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WHITE THOUSAND OF OURS





# WHITE THOUSAND OF OURS

BY  
CLARE BRODY

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE LANDING A MILE OF ROAD ON THE BANKS OF THE HOOGHLY	9
II NOTED IN MARBLE	14
III IN THE CITADEL OF CLIVE	20
IV THE GATE AND THE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS	27
V RULE OF MAN AND POWER OF THE SUN	38
VI NIGHT IN THE BASEMENT	43
VII A BAR IN BOUNDS	51
VIII A CITY IN STILL HOURS	60
IX ON THE VERGE OF THE JUNGLE	68
X KITCHENER IN THE BARRACK-ROOM	73
XI FROM BENGAL TO THE LAND WHERE WE SAW THE WHITE PEAKS OF THE HINDU KUSH	79
XII THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER BEFORE OUR TIME THE GREAT SURVEYS TRIBAL BORDERLAND'S STORY	83
XIII THE LION, THE BEAR AND THE BUFFER	94
XIV THE CALL	102
XV THE MARCH	109
XVI CHALLENGE	116
XVII AN AFFAIR AT SUNRISE	122
XVIII THE MORNING AFTER	132
XIX THE CAMP BY THE MULBERRY TREES	135
XX THE MIDNIGHT RETURN	140
XXI THE HILLS THAT LOOKED DOWN ON A GREAT VALLEY	148
XXII THE SPEECH OF STRONG MEN	157
XXIII SIGHT OF HIMALAYAN SNOWS AND SMELL OF PINES	169
XXIV AFIELD IN THE PLAINS	175
XXV LAST DAYS FAREWELL TO THE THOUSAND	190



## CHAPTER I

### THE LANDING : A MILE OF ROAD ON THE BANKS OF THE HOOGLHY

OUR troopship voyage had ended, and our regiment had arrived in India. We had come from an island beyond the equator. We had crossed the Indian Ocean to Bombay, and transhipped at that port. Thence, bound for Calcutta, we had rounded the peninsula ; and now, that famed navigator, the Hooghly pilot, having steered our ship from the estuary, we had completed the river voyage of a hundred miles from the Bay of Bengal, and were berthed at Kidderpore docks in Calcutta.

Glad to have arrived, and glad to be ashore again after three weeks of troopship life, the regiment having disembarked, left the wharves, passed out of the dockyard and formed up on the road outside. Then, headed by the welcoming band of another regiment, it marched on to its destined station, Fort William, from the ramparts of which the commander-in-Chief's flag was flying to show that here were the headquarters of the army in India.

Twenty-five years had passed since a battalion of this country regiment, called in this book, the "Gosling Greens," had been stationed in Fort William, and those twenty-five years had brought great changes. But "the regiment was still the regiment." It held to its traditions. It still kept its anniversary as a festival day, when it trooped its colours, wore emblems, and had a feast. It still taught its history to recruits, and its pride in its honours, its crest and Latin motto, had not lessened. It strove as ever to win distinction for itself, and it cherished everything that might show it to be in one respect or another, superior to other regiments of the Line. For its title it preferred to be known, as of old, by an ordinal number instead of by the name of an English county. It thought imperially rather than provincially. It looked far



beyond the confines of its own regimental district, and regarded the British Isles as its recruiting territory.

Seasoned and bronzed after years of service in other parts of the tropics, this battalion had now come to India to complete the period of its tour of foreign service, to go and serve in that country wheresoever its destiny ordained, till the wished for time arrived, when, having "done its twenty-one abroad," it would pack its stores and kit, and on a fine day, full of heart and cheer, file up the gangway of a troopship bound for England.

Now, as one who was of this regiment's thousand during the greater part of its time in India, and as a narrator from memory of events and scenes in the regiment's career during those few years, I have here in the first place to admit that I was not among those who marched from the docks to Fort William on that day we landed at Calcutta. The fact is, I being a casualty, was left on the wharves with the "sick." My foot had been injured on board. I had been lying in the ship's hospital during the voyage, and was still a cripple when I came ashore. And so it happened that at the moment when the strains of the band playing the regiment to Fort William, were growing fainter in the distance, I and a few other men had taken our seats on the ambulances that had come to transport us to the station hospital.

The tract we traversed from the ship to the hospital was thus the first part we saw of the interior of India, and though this no doubt was but a very little portion of the immense territory that stretches from the Himalayas to the sea, it afforded many sights for the eyes of new arrivals observing from slow-going vehicles.

The weather was fine. The sun shone from a clear sky. We were told that there had been no rain in these parts for a long period, and that there had not been a breeze strong enough to rustle a tree since the close of the last monsoon. No wonder, then, foliage was covered with dust. Indeed not only on the trees, but everywhere the dust was conspicuous. And dilapidation, decay, and other signs of the climate's effects were to be seen on every side.

On the way the first sight to draw remarks from our party, and to raise smiles, was a gang of coolies who were repairing the road, and doing so by ways and means that seemed curious to us. There were both male and female workers employed on the job. The women were shrunken little creatures. Their faces were tanned and drawn, and they spoke in shrill, querulous tones as they assisted in the work by removing the excavated material, which they filled into little baskets and carried away on their heads.

We had not gone far beyond the place where the road repairers were working, when we saw some more of the "little women of India," but of a different class. This was a party of girls that came out of a lane and entered the main highway. These were as free from the purdah as their sisters down the road, but whereas the tanned faces of the coolie women showed all the signs of life in the open air, the soft sallow faces of these girls showed all the signs of indoor life, for they were dancing girls. They were the children of the *nautch*.

Here and there on dead walls and posts along the way we saw advertisements in English in praise of teas, beers and patent medicines. We passed through part of a typical bazar where the grain dealer, the grocer, the sweetmeat seller, and the shoddy jeweller hung out their signs and displayed their little stocks. And our escorting corporal instructing, drew our attention to a toddy shop out of which a lascar came smacking his lips, after having swallowed a draught of that unbrewed liquor that can be procured by puncturing the bole of a kind of palm tree.

In this same shabby quarter of petty shops, we observed one or two of those little hole-in-the wall stalls kept by small miserable men who deal in the cheapest and most trivial of things, but things which, in the aggregate, amount to an immense trade in India, as commercial travellers from central Europe discovered long ago. These little stalls were adorned with cheap mirrors, and gaudy pictures of deities that were apt to strike the mind of the European with the thought that the Hindu was not only a man of another race and continent, but belonged to another world. And those dealers, whose customers were the poorest of the populace, sold morsels of *pan*, or the betel leaf that is smeared with lime and nut parings, and that is the relished masticatory of millions. These little retailers to poor men's needs also sold the cheapest of matches, and cigarettes of which a few could be bought for the one-twelfth of an anna, the *pie*, that figures in all accounts, and in great state budgets, but that is never carried in the pocket of a man of substance.

We saw numbers of bullock-carts lumbering along on their way to the docks, some laden with bales of jute, some with hides, and others with neat chests of fragrant Assam tea bound for the London market; and along the railway that served the port of Calcutta, we had already seen a long freight train steaming onwards to the same docks with a huge quantity of coal from the collieries of Bengal.

Jute, tea, coal, and hides—here were exhibits of the chief exports of Calcutta, and of the commerce of Bengal. But the means by which most of this merchandise was trans-

ported by road were not worthy of the commerce. The carts were of the most primitive type—they might have been in use twenty-five centuries ago. The bullocks were small, lean, and worn, and they looked as if they had been overworked and ill-fed. Their bones were protruding, their bare backs showed the marks of former sores, and as they toiled slowly along with their heavy loads, they were now and again goaded, whacked, and cursed by their drivers, who, curious to relate, were men of the caste to whom the ox is sacred.

On this road we saw for the first time some of the hackney carriages of Calcutta. These were classed first, second, and third. The first and second were of the open phaeton type. The third class were closed, or box-like *garis* with venetian sides. *Garis* of this type were designed not only to protect against rain and sun, but also to secure privacy for women in purdah. The *gari* ponies were small, lean animals from the sight of which you would think that India was not a land for the horse. We could see, however, from one or two showy examples, that there was the world of a difference between the poor man's *gari* and pony, and the turnout of the man who could afford the best, who could afford to keep a stylish coach, a pampered imported horse, and a driver and syce. Indeed, to compare one class with another would be to compare the rajah in his palace with the ryot in his little hut.

Of persons passing to and fro on the way, the one who attracted our closest attention was a man whose clothing consisted only of a loin cloth. His face and the bare parts of his body were smeared with ashes. His hair was long and dishevelled. He wore the sacred thread of the Hindu, and his neck was encircled by a string of rude beads that were as big as walnuts. He had a white pastemark on the centre of his forehead, and he carried a long staff and a beggar's bowl. He was a *sanyasi*, or a religious mendicant, we were told. He was one of those who wander far and wide, and who may be seen now and again in every city and bazar throughout India.

Not far from the spot where we passed the *sanyasi*, we saw something that brought our minds back again to our own side of the world. We overtook and passed a straggling party of European seamen. Some of these men wore straw hats, and some bowlers—droll headwear for sailor-men on the banks of the Hooghly. All of a crew, perhaps, these seafarers seemed to be liberty men fresh from a ship that had just arrived in port, and was now berthed in the docks. They were going towards the city, and you might guess that their steps would lead sure enough to the dens where the

hard earnings of their voyage would pass freely to the till of Honest Jack.

After a glimpse of a Hindu temple, and a mosque, and after having observed in the distance a church with a commanding spire, we passed over a bridge that spanned a tidal waterway called "Tolly's Nullah." This was a canal named after Colonel John Tolly, an officer of note "in the days of the Company." By him that channel was constructed at his own expense, and so it is worthily named. It communicated with the interior, and its traffic of country boats showed its commercial service. A number of urchins were paddling in its turbid waters, and within the channel bed, a little distance away, stood three buffaloes, chewing the cud, blinking their eyes, and whisking their tails.

The canal overhung by palms and banyan trees, the little boys disporting in the muddy waters, the buffaloes, the rude country boats, the temple of the Hindus, the mosque of the Moslems, the nautch girls, the little bazar stalls, the mendicant with his beggar's bowl and staff, the dust and dilapidation—all this within that one area which we had now traversed, might have been represented to us as a picture of the country. Had a better informed and a wittier guide accompanied our party, he might at this stage have turned to us with a smile and a wave of the hand, and said: "you have seen India!"

Having crossed the canal by the bridge over which were laid the lines of tramway that connected the city of Calcutta with this riverside suburb of docks and shipping, we found the scene entirely changed. Here we reached the limit of the unsightly area. Shabby bazar scenes passed out of sight, and the view ahead was now pleasing. Here we obtained our first glimpse of a portion of the great open space that lies between the city and the Hooghly. We beheld the noted *Maidan*, or spacious public park of Calcutta, with its racecourse, its playgrounds, its gardens, walks, and roads, its fine trees, and the citadel commanding the river—Fort William.

After we had reached the level ground below the bridge ramp, a turning to eastward brought us alongside the enclosure of the Calcutta racecourse. Then, proceeding for some distance along the main highway, known as the Circular Road, we arrived at the point where bold white letters on a black signboard showed us our destination.

## CHAPTER II

### NOTED IN MARBLE

THE building announced by the signboard has been described as "a fine pile with a colonnade frontage of great extent." The exterior gave no hint of the purpose to which the building was applied, and were it not for the sign facing the road, a stranger passing by might take it to be the stately home of some man of position, or some "nabob" of commerce. But, as the bold white letters on the black board declared, it was the "Station Hospital—British Troops."

For that purpose, and no other, it had been designedly built in the eighteen-twenties. But when the work was finished a curious thing happened. The brand new building was taken over and converted into a law-court by the authority of Lord William Bentinck, who was the Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835. That law-court, the civil court of appeal which used to be known as the "Sudder Dewan-i-Adulat," functioned there until the year 1862, when a great and historic change had come over the country.

By this time the rule of the East India Company had gone. The Company's army was no more, and there was now but the army of the Crown. Changes too had come about in the law of the land, and in the system of courts. In Calcutta a High Court was established. This "Sudder Dewan-i-Adulat" was abolished, and the building which it had occupied for more than thirty years at last became that for which it had been purposely built—the station hospital for British troops.

Evidently some men of a later period considered that these facts gave distinction to the place, and that therefore the building might fittingly bear on its front some brief record of its career. Hence the inscription on the marble tablet set in the wall on the approach to the carriage porch. That stamped the building as historical. That told a story in a few lines, and reminded the visitor that this military hospital

had at one time been a seat of justice, that it had been the "Sudder Dewan-i-Adulat," a title that was Persian, that meant chief, or head court, and that had survived since the days of the Moghul Empire.

The hospital had a fine situation. It faced the Maidan and the racecourse. In front, between the building and the road, was a lawn, or garden, where those who were not "bed patients" might sit on benches placed behind the iron railing at the roadside. Here the men would gossip and smoke, and read old newspapers and magazines. In the evening they could view Calcutta's "best people" driving past, and on Saturdays, during the racing season, they could see the horses passing this point, which was at the turn before the straight. Turf correspondents called this turn the "Hospital Bend." When the horses appeared at this point all eyes were upon them, the race became exciting, and the clamour from the crowd at the stands swelled into a roar.

At the back of the hospital was a neighbourhood where men of eminence lived in the eighteenth century. Here resided the famous Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, and here he fought his duel with Sir Philip Francis. William Makepeace Thackeray, the noted novelist, had lived here in his infancy; and to Macaulay, who mentions "the green hedgerows of Alipore" in his essay on Warren Hastings, this neighbourhood had been familiar ground.

These facts concerning the building and its surroundings might have been marked well by students of local history. But to the man from barracks going into "dock" with his haversack slung from his shoulder, they could be of little interest. On the military "sick" the significance of "Sudder Dewan-i-Adulat" was lost. And it may be doubted whether of all the men who had ever entered this hospital, one had reflected that if the walls of this building could speak, they might tell many a curious tale of Indian litigation in the latter part of the period that veterans now in dust used to call "the good old days of John Company."

Some time after our little party from the troopship had entered the hospital, and had been inspected by the medical officer, I limped on to the verandah to view the surroundings, and as I rested my elbows on the top of the railing, the first object that caught my eye was a grey squirrel that descended from a tree, raced along the ground for a little distance, found something to nibble at, and then raced back again to the tree—its base and its home.

The grounds seemed to be laid out as well as they might be. They were pleasing to the eye. Tropical vegetation yielded ornament. Trees of choice species grew around the hospital,

and there was a flourishing shrubbery. Gay-flowering creeper-climbed tree trunks, and trim hedges and borders, and plants in painted tubs, all showed the *mali's* attentive nurture.

The place was frequented by all the birds that may be seen or heard in gardens or wooded grounds in India. The chirping of sparrows and the cawing of crows was continuous. Doves cooed in sunny hours, and now and again you would hear the coppersmith whose *tonk! tonk! tonk!* commands the ear above the voices of all other birds. And the coppersmith's note has a tristful burthen. Listen to it for a moment and your thoughts take a pensive turn. But it is a pleasanter note to hear at any time than the voice of that little cousin of the vulture, the kitehawk. And because there were kitchens and refuse bins at the back of this hospital, the kitehawk was here, squalid and unkempt of plumage, and ever watchful whether on the wing or on the perch, for the dropping of a scrap or bone.

One day and another were alike in this hospital. Morning after morning at the peep of dawn we could hear the notes of reveille sounded in a camp not far away; morning after morning, as we mused for a little while before rising, we would wonder if, after all, that lace curtain had baffled the mosquito. Perhaps at some moment or other during the long night the insect in its quest for the blood of the white man fresh from overseas had discovered a little rent in the fabric of the mesh?

As the light increased, the sparrows chirped louder in the shrubberies outside, and the crows became noisier in their roosts. The milk cart from the contractor's dairy would drive up with a rattle of churns, and stop beneath the porch to deliver its supply. The "sick party" would come at nine o'clock and bring news and letters from barracks, and an hour later followed the chief event of the day, announced in the ward by the subdued command—"Shun!—Medical Officer!"

The medical officer was accompanied on his rounds by an Anglo-Indian assistant surgeon, who was known as the "Pot," a nickname that had survived from the days when the duties now performed by officers of the Indian Sub-ordinate Medical Department, used to be performed by apothecaries. And following on the heels of the assistant surgeon was an Indian ward orderly holding a blotter and the ink bottle into which the doctor dipped his pen to make the entries on the diet sheets as he passed from cot to cot.

Long before noon the inspection was over. The M.O. and the "Pot" had vanished, and for the rest of the day we

would have the ward all to ourselves, to pass the time as we might—to read or gossip, or to argue in light humour on matters of no consequence—say, the relative merits of cities and counties, and football teams in the Old Country.

And so the hours passed, till at length the yellowing sunbeams stole away from the verandah, and we would hear again the sounding of retreat in a camp unknown to us. In the twilight pictures on the walls looked ghostly, menials vanished from the precincts, and the place became silent and lonesome. The electric lights relieved the gloom, but still that ward on the ground floor where there were only a few men, was a dismal place.

As the evening advanced, the lonesomeness and stillness deepened, and if you rested your elbows on the verandah railing, and looked into the garden and listened, you would hear but the cicada and the frog. Thus, at the suggestion of circumstance, as it were, we went to bed early. By "lights out" we were all on our cots, and each man had tucked himself in within the lace mosquito net that curtained his bed.

And on more than one night about this hour, when all talk had ceased, and the building was in deep stillness, we heard the roar of a lion that was caged in a neighbouring zoo. That voice of the king of beasts was no doubt the loudest utterance of the animal creation, and when heard in the night it is said to be "like the sound of distant thunder." But here we might reflect that far more formidable than the lion's roar was the faint hum of the mosquito that was now buzzing round our cots, for was not that little insect armed with the power of filling hospitals and debilitating regiments and armies?

Although now and again the thought of my misfortune in having been crippled on that troopship came back to my mind, I had no cause for discontent during the time I spent in this hospital. And I had the consolation of knowing that I was losing not a pice of my little pay. I knew I was "getting my stoppages," as they say in the army, for a board of inquiry had found that I was on duty at the time when I sustained the injury.

And I seemed to be getting on very nicely with everybody in this "dock." Words and looks cheered as I got to know everybody better, and I gained favour in little ways. As the entries on my diet sheet showed, I had been granted several "extras" by the M.O. I had become friendly with the "Pot," and had gained the kindly acquaintance of some men of other regiments who were in the hospital.



Even so, as the time passed, I was becoming more anxious to get back to the regiment, to see how things were going on in the altered circumstances of our new station in a strange country, to see the barracks, and to see Fort William. So, a few days after I had given up my crutches, I decided to apply for my discharge. I assured the medical officer, in reply to his question, that I could march and do guard duty, though in saying so I had a secret hope that the occasion for such tests would not come very soon, for though I was no longer lame, I could see that my left instep (which received the injury) was still a little higher than the right. However, the medical officer, considering that I should be some days attending hospital, agreed to my discharge, and one Saturday afternoon I took a seat on the ambulance bound for Fort William.

Progress by this conveyance was slow—"a little faster than a snail's pace," as my companion remarked. But the journey was short, as the distance to the Fort was only a mile, and the route was across one part of the Maidan. The weather was pleasant. It was a fine serene evening, and the great expanse of park, already turning green, was admirable to view in the mellow radiance of the declining sun. It was the hour for recreation, and we passed by, or saw in the distance, people coming out from the city to play games on the Maidan, to walk or to drive along the tree-fringed roads that bordered or crossed this vast playground and public park.

As the ambulance trailed along, naturally the one little query that occupied my mind was: I wonder what this Fort looks like? Somewhere I had read a few words that described the place in the eighteenth century when the fortress was new, and when those who had had a hand in its construction were still living. An Englishwoman, Miss Sophia Goldburne, having seen the place in 1780, wrote in a letter to somebody that "the New Fort is deemed to be one of the finest forts in the world, has a chain across the river to secure the harbour from invasion, covers nearly five miles of ground, and has all the bustling charms of a garrison."

Thus, in one sentence, the lady packed a good deal of information for anyone in the Home Country desirous of knowing what kind of fortress had been built by the river-side in Calcutta. But there had been a world of change since the day when Miss Goldburne penned those words. That chain across the river and other relics had gone long ago, new buildings had arisen within the ramparts, and now the question was how Fort William looked in the early years of this twentieth century?

On two occasions while in the hospital I had made an inquiry to that effect, but the replies I got from men did not

enlighten me. One fellow answered that the Fort was "all right," and another only said that it was "quite a big place." And, although we had already entered one of the Fort's winding sorties, and were but a few hundred yards from the spot where the sight of my own eyes would answer the question, I asked my companion on the ambulance: "What does the Fort look like?"

The man, after a pause, while he drew at a cigarette, answered with a twinkle in his eye, that the place was "something partly like a little town inside."

That reply struck a light for the imagination. It gave me an idea of the place. Indeed, some days later, when I reflected on the matter, I considered that it was a very good reply. And I may remark, by the way, that the original intention was that Fort William might be a town as well as a fortress. That was the design of the founder. In Clive's head was the anticipation that the place would serve a two-fold purpose. It was open to the merchant if he chose to come and trade here in security. But the merchant came not during the time the privilege was open, and it appears that the counting house has never been seen within the ramparts of Fort William.

## CHAPTER III

### IN THE CITADEL OF CLIVE

FROM the gate by which we entered (the Chowringhee Gate), the view of Fort William was pleasing. In this part no austere military features met the eye. Instead of stark barrack walls and gravelled drill squares, here were grassy grounds, bordered roads and paths, green rampart slopes, trim hedges and flowering shrubs. Here the area was wooded like the fringes of a park or lawn, and the trees which were of choice species were the roosts for crows, doves, flying foxes, and for those warblers whose notes enliven Indian gardens and woods.

Entering the fort from this point you saw no barracks if you looked directly ahead. You gazed down a shady avenue, on one side of which, and near at hand, was a neat garrison chapel, and northward in the distance among trees stood a much larger church. This was a graceful edifice in the Gothic style, and its model was said to be a well-known church in an English university town.

The road leading to this church, that is the road leading from the Chowringhee Gate, is noted in a local history as having formerly been "a noble avenue of trees." But those original fine trees vanished in 1864. They were uprooted by the great cyclone that swept over Calcutta in that year, and that not only laid low many a fine tree, but wrecked all the shipping on the Hooghly. Those trees may have been standing there since the fort was built, and if so, their age must have been over four score. They were of a select kind, we may suppose, and had probably been planted with the design of imparting ornament and dignity to this avenue which was the direct approach to the residence of the Governor-General of Bengal, to Government House, that building which, adapted to the use of the garrison, has been known since the days of the "Bayard of India," as the "Outram Institute."

That central tree-shaded avenue bounded the principal parade ground of Fort William on the west side. On the opposite, or east side, parallel with the parade ground, stood a lofty and capacious barrack, the face of which was partly screened by the trees that bordered the road in front of the building. This barrack, which was now occupied by seven companies of our battalion, was a prominent structure that towered so high above the ramparts that its upper storeys could be seen from the Maidan, and from places away in the city.

No cantonment anywhere in the country had a building like this. There were barracks and barracks of many types here and there in that region that stretched from Persia to Siam, but they were all but huts compared with this lofty pile in Fort William. As you gazed at the face of the building and reflected, you might conceive that those military engineers when they addressed themselves to its design, had thought great thoughts and resolved that: "here we will build for the white soldier such a barrack as has never been thought of before in this land of evil climate, and one that shall be worthy of its site in this citadel of Clive."

No architecture did it show. Of ornament or expressive detail it was devoid. But, it was none the less worth viewing as a military edifice. For its time and for its purpose, it was a notable work in brick and mortar. It bore the stamp of its period, and many things about it showed that the aim of the designers had been to create, with due consideration of the climate, a superior building for European troops. Its dimensions were remarkable. It was great in length, in width, and height, and its three upper floors could accommodate a regiment of a thousand men and more.

At ground level the arches opening on the verandah from the basement, or ground floor, showed walls of massive width. On this floor were the canteen, stores, and regimental shops. The three upper floors housed the troops, and on the barrack's flat roof, which was enclosed by a high balustraded parapet, there was ample space to exercise companies at free gymnastics. Up there too signallers could communicate with places afar, and those who went there for sightseeing could view the great expanse of the Maidan, the city, and the broad, winding sweep of the Hooghly and its shipping.

At the moment when I alighted from the ambulance on the road in front of this building, the first man I chanced to see, and the first by whom I was greeted, was my chum, Bradshaw B. By him I was introduced, as it were, to the barrack. He accompanied me upstairs, led me to the part of

the first floor occupied by our company, and explained things to me as we went along.

When I reached the landing and looked ahead, I beheld a barrack interior the like of which I had never seen before. I saw a vast floor area divided into three parallel arcaded dormitories that extended from end to end of the barrack, a building, be it noted, that exceeded the length of the football ground that lay alongside it. These three dormitories liberally accommodated three companies, and there was great openness and freedom of access through the arcades. One company could always see what its neighbour company was doing, and a man sitting on his cot in one dormitory could chat with another man in the adjoining dormitory.

Barrack though it was, a view of this interior might give you the idea that the military engineer might have got a hint for his design from the body of some great cathedral. Certainly the church-like principle in the plan was manifest, for there was that central dormitory corresponding to a nave, and there were those two side dormitories corresponding to the aisles.

Almost everything within the four walls of this building seemed curious to newcomers. The barrack-room cot, for instance, was not at all like the type of cot with which we had hitherto been familiar. Both the bedstead and bedding were strange to the man fresh from overseas and accustomed to the "kip" in a British barrack-room.

In the first place the mattress was different. Instead of those three square cushion-like sections called "biscuits," that were so handy, and so adaptable, we had here a single mattress—a white cotton tick with coir filling. In the morning this was rolled up at the head of the bedstead next the wall, and on top of the roll were placed the blankets and sheets neatly folded in a particular way that had been adopted as the regimental style. This done, the whole bedding was tidied and kept in position by being bound in the centre by a leathern strap and buckle.

The bedstead itself was a rude contrivance. We had not here that handy steel framework of two adjustable sections that slid on castors, and that could be shortened to half its length when the bed was made up—a bedstead that then, with those "biscuits" enfolded in those brown blankets, served very well for an easy seat. In place of that system, we had for a bedstead here simply two sheets of corrugated iron laid side by side on trestles. A rough bedstead indeed was this, and it was covered only by a rug of coarse texture, called a *satrangi*, which had the colour of the fir tree's foliage.

And the flooring beneath those rough cots, and throughout the barrack? Ah, the flooring! No marble pavement here, or tiling that would have subdued austerities and imparted a world of decency to these interiors. In those former barracks of ours away beyond the seas, we had floors of teak that when scrubbed and mopped looked as spick as the promenade decks of a great liner, and were fit for the tread of the grandest. But nothing like that had we here. This great big barrack could show but rude stone floors, a pavement of slabs that were irregular in shape, uneven in surface, and water-worn.

Now it might be supposed that this material was chosen merely because it was cheap and came easily to the hand of the contractor. That indeed was what I thought at first. But as I came to know the country a little better, I considered that those stone slabs could not have been easily procured. Fort William stands amid a region that has no quarries. That tract of country is stoneless. There is not a pebble native to the soil in deltaic Bengal.

Having chosen a vacant cot, and marked by claim to the berth by hanging my haversack on a peg, I was gazing at things when Bradshaw reminding me that the hot weather was coming on, pointed to two wooden frames that had just been erected on either side of the dormitory a few feet above the level of the cots. These frames had been designed to carry *punkas*, or fans made of frilled pieces of thick coarse cotton attached to pieces of wood which were suspended horizontally from the frame and at intervals of a few feet. When the time came to put the system in motion, the frames, each about 360 feet long, and electrically operated, would swing to and fro alternately from end to end of the building, thus continuously fan-fanning the rows of cots on either side of the dormitory.

Some more words having been spoken about the weather, Bradshaw next mentioned that with the change of season, the troops would soon be wearing white cotton duck for church parades. And further he reminded me, and did so with stress on his words, that whatever the dress might be—whether “white,” “reds,” or khaki—the troops went to church armed with rifles, carried twenty rounds of ammunition in their bandoliers, and took their rifles with them into the pews.

While our talk on little matters like these went on, the evening had advanced. Bradshaw remarked that it was canteen time, and in token of the fact approached his shelf and took therefrom a drinking mug. In doing so he explained to me that no drinking vessels were provided in the

canteens in India. No pewter pots would we see in this country. Here a man going to the canteen had to take his own mug, or "pot," which might be bought in the garrison bazar or grocery bar for a few annas. If he preferred he might take a glass tumbler, but then glass was fragile, and in the canteen was not safe except in the hands of light drinkers, or "steady files," who kept apart from the boisterous groups.

Bradshaw was now dressed in a suit of khaki that was fresh from the wash. His brass buttons, his regimental initials, and his crest, had been brightly burnished. His hair, in the army style of the period, had been brushed with an upward curl of the fringe, and it might be guessed that he had put on his forage cap by the guidance of the looking glass.

With his mug suspended from his jacket hook, he moved away a pace or two. Then turning on his heel, and applying a thumb and finger to the end of his moustache, he inquired whether I too was not going "to have a pint." But to that suggestion my reply was evasive. I did not say yes or no. I left my will free by merely saying that first of all I should have to get my bedding and my kit from the store. And so Bradshaw went off to the canteen alone.

By the time I had obtained from the storeman all the things I wanted, the night had closed in, and the scene of dormitories, arcades, cots and black kit-bags with white names had been brightened by the electric lights. The whole barrack floor, the whole "flat," as it was called, was now almost empty. When I first came upstairs with Bradshaw there were many men about the place, but now there were only a few. Those who had been idling had disappeared one by one, and those who had been cleaning their kits, having finished the job, had also left the barrack-room. Away towards the end of the building the splashing of water could be heard. There some men who had been having copious shower-baths, whistled and sang as if their hearts had never known a sorrow. And now, fresh from the ablution and towelled, they had come back to their cots to dress.

Two of these men had an evening's freedom beyond the ramparts in mind. They were bound for town, and for town at this season khaki was the dress. Plain khaki, designed for service and not for walking out—that did not please the eye. That was not admirable in the street. What girl would glance a second time at a uniform dyed the colour of brown, unbaked mud! In another few weeks the dress for walking out would be "white," and that would be decenter; but in the meantime the walker-out had to make the best of

khaki. And here now within a few yards of my own cot, but in the next dormitory, was one of these men, brisk and cheerful after that shower bath, contriving to attain much smartness even with that unattractive *wardi*. He had scorned, it seemed, to be seen in "ammunitions," and had provided himself with a pair of light boots that had been made to measure and at his own cost in the regimental shoemaker's shop. The khaki suit that he had now put on was fresh from the hands of the "flying *dhobi*." His leather belt had a fine polish, his forage cap was as clean as a new pin, and his crest and all the other "brasses" were shining.

At length, buttoned, belted, and capped, this young man who had made himself look smart in khaki, took a final peep for assurance into a little mirror that had come all the way from central Europe, gave a further tuck to his jacket skirts, and then, cane in hand, a handkerchief fresh from the launderer inside his sleeve, and a cigarette dangling from his lips, he swanked down the passage with a springy step and a cheery countenance, and I supposed from his looks that he had a permanent pass in his breast pocket, and that Post would not see him back in barracks.

But though many, like this young man, may have sought some little diversion in the town that evening, or may have gone to places elsewhere away from barracks, I was sure that all told, the number of these men was small compared with the number of those who had assembled in the canteen. That canteen was on the ground floor of this building, or on the floor below where I now sat. And I could well imagine how down there the gathering had grown and grown since the barrel tap was turned for the first filling.

As the evening advanced, the drone from downstairs swelled. At first it was little louder than the humming of summer bees in a sycamore tree, but now it was louder and deeper than the drone from a noisy school. And meanwhile, as the canteen gained tongue, the barrack floor area had become quieter and quieter, till at length, on looking round, I perceived that I was alone. There was not another soul in the dormitories, and that volume of murmur that arose from the babel of the beer-drinkers reminded me that the life of the regiment was on the ground floor. That circumstance carried potent suggestion to a man sitting alone, and thinking as I was thinking at that moment.

At the time when Bradshaw left me I had no relish for beer, and, besides, I was reluctant to show myself in the canteen after my long absence from the regiment. But now loneliness altered my mind and gave decision. And that rising babel from the floor beneath me sounded in my ears



as a call to beer and company. I arose, went downstairs, and entered the canteen with the shy approach of an absentee. There, by men whose faces I had not seen for weeks, I was greeted with a heartiness that gladdened, and I sat down to a welcoming treat that I drank not from a pewter pot, but from a blue enamelled mug. There, in the slang and trite phrase of the service, the passing gup of the barracks and the garrison was poured into my ears, and I was put in knowledge of all those little things that a man misses by being in "dock."

Sweet was the cheer of that canteen table, and well we might have wished that time would lag. But the clock never seems a friend of jaymakers. Time stole on to Post. One hour passed, and then it was nine. Thirty minutes later came the end. "Taps" were struck as the big gun was fired from the ramparts. The babel was quelled. The gathering broke up. Men climbed by a railed stairs to the floors above and brought the air of the canteen into the barrack-rooms, where here and there among the cots, the groups of drinking associates, or "schools" with beery breaths kept up a clamorous and confused debate till silenced and dispersed by the sounding of "lights out."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GATE AND THE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

BRADSHAW B was the man who brought me the news that my first turn had come for guard duty in Fort William. The detail had not been posted on the notice board, and the document had still to come forth from the orderly sergeant's bunk. But Bradshaw, a man of alert wit and keen curiosity, knowing that the company had to find men for the next day's guard, had managed somehow to ascertain the names of those men even before they had been written out by the sergeant. And having come by this unpublished knowledge, my chum came clattering down the stone-flagged passage to my cot, and there in an accent that left no doubt about the part of England he came from, quietly said to me :

"You're for guard, lad, tomorrow, and so am I, and you'll do your two-on and four-off with me on Chowringhee Gate."

Now to tell a man a thing like that was to communicate to him a matter of much concern, because in those days "particular smartness" in the performance of guard duties was expected from British troops in Fort William. And for this there was good reason. Calcutta was then the capital of India. Fort William was the headquarters of the army, and here the commander-in-chief resided during the winter. So in a place thus under the eye of the highest command, the garrison had to mind its p's and q's.

In preparation for guard-mounting of course the utmost "attention" was given to "dress." Every man, it seemed, took pains not only to escape the reproach of being "checked" on this parade, but even strove to be more spick and span than his fellows. And excellence in this endeavour might bring a little reward. The man judged "cleanest and smartest" by the inspecting officer, received the "stick," an award which won him exemption from actual guard duty. The lucky private thus awarded, would nominally become commanding officer's orderly for the day, and so would have his "night in bed."

But the "stick" was not easily gained. The inspection by the adjutant was exceedingly strict, and sometimes lasted nearly half an hour. And glad was the man whose name was called at the end of this long and tense scrutiny. Some there were who gained this little token of merit more than once, but many others though they laboured hard for the petty prize, always laboured in vain.

Now, for this particular guard for which we were warned, Bradshaw and I prepared with great care. In the polishing of our leather, in the burnishing of our brasses, and in other little labours on our clothing and equipment, our industry was deserving. But to neither of us came the award of the "stick" on the parade next morning; and so for twenty-four hours we were companions on guard at Chowringhee Gate—one of the six gates of Fort William.

Chowringhee Gate, though its guard was not commanded by a sergeant, was not for all that an unimportant post. There, for one reason, a man had to be even more vigilant than a sentry at the main guard, for the commander-in-chief, then Lord Kitchener, lived near. The short drive that led up the ramparts to his residence was only a stone's-throw away. Here too we were under the notice of the brigadier commanding the Presidency Brigade, for that officer's quarters, which were also on the ramparts, were directly above the guard-room.

The beat in front of the arched entrance beneath the ramparts was from east to west, and the sentry's front was deemed to be north, or towards the interior of the Fort. That was the direction in which salutes were delivered; but according to the instructions for the sentry on the order-board, it was evident that a man had also to keep watch on the contrary direction, and hence it was called by somebody "a facing-both-ways sentry post."

A short distance in front of the guard-room, and shaded by trees, was the Catholic garrison church, and immediately behind this was an old building which was used for the detention of military prisoners, but had been built in the days of John Company for an entirely different purpose. It seemed a curious old structure, and its walls bore a quaint inscription which few passing by ever stopped to read. Some may have glanced at it, but not read it attentively, and though it may have caught the attention of Lord Kitchener, who lived across the way, he too, perhaps, like many others, may not have given a second thought to it.

But about one hundred and thirty years or so before the period of which I am writing, before the trees had grown here, and long before that little church had been built nearby,

this building must have been much in the eye of the garrison ; and I imagine that in those days a young cadet come out to join the East India Company's army, and taking a walk round here with a friend, would have it pointed out to him as a notable object, and as a work designed for an important purpose.

Now, one hundred and thirty years having passed away, this building had become notable for another reason. It was now historical, and upon its walls was this quaint and cryptic record of a former fact : "This building contains 51,258 maunds of rice, and 20,023½ maunds of paddy (rice in the husk) which were deposited by order of the Governor-General and Council under the inspection of John Belli, Agent for providing Victualling Stores to this garrison in the months of March, April, and May, 1782."

Here then within view of the sentry's post was a relic of one of the works of Warren Hastings. And the words of the inscription recalled the impeachment of the famous Governor for "high crimes and misdemeanours" in Bengal, brought to mind the stately scene of his trial in Westminster Hall, and the thundering declamation of Edmund Burke. The military victualler-in-chief under whose supervision that great quantity of rice was once upon a time deposited here, was the same John Belli who in the fifteenth charge of the impeachment is mentioned thus : "That he (Hastings) appointed his private secretary, John Belli, Esquire, to be Agent for the supply of Stores and Provisions for the Garrison of Fort William in Bengal with a commission of thirty per cent."

As recorded, the building had been used as a store for grain. For that purpose alone it had been constructed after the great famine that devastated Bengal in 1770. To provide against a recurrence of such a calamity, it was decided by Hastings and his Council to establish granaries on the banks of the principal rivers in Bengal. The design was to build these depots of solid masonry, and in time of plenty to store them with grain against years of scarcity.

In the execution of this plan, Hastings worked with resolution and spirit ; and in a letter written to a friend in England in 1783, he thus refers to this granary in Fort William : "I have begun such a proviision in the Fort where we have bottled up 70,000 maunds, and I do not intend to uncork it until it has stood twenty years."

So much about the situation of this guard. Now for our experiences on sentry duty there for twenty-four hours.

Our party relieved the old guard at the usual changing hour, which was nine o'clock, and the new sentries received

instructions. There were two posts. Number one was in front of the guard-room, and number two was at a point away on the ramparts.

For sentry-go on number one post, the first turn came to a London youth. He was a talkative chap. His tongue was seldom still. But he was a little absent-minded, and once in a sharp exchange of words with another man, he was told that he had more gab than presence of mind.

To this man the orders were read, and at the end of the reading, the corporal advised him to keep an eye out for Lord Kitchener, who, as usual, would be driving past to his office at the Military Secretariat in the city.

"He'll soon be comin' along," said the corporal. "Watch out for a coach and two fine dark bays, as similar as two peas—you can't mistake him."

Having given these instructions and dismissed the new guard after the old guard had marched away, the corporal re-entered the guard-room, sat down at a table, and with a scratchy pen, proceeded to make the required entries in the guard report.

While the other men of the guard smoked cigarettes and played cards, Private Bradshaw lay on a cot and read a handy little book in a paper cover. This he said, was "a good yarn by Nat Gould." Indeed to Bradshaw every story written by Nat Gould was good. Few if any books written by other hands did he read. And as the theme of Gould's fiction was horse-racing, so the reading showed the man. Stories of the turf came home to Bradshaw's bosom. But horse-racing was not the only sport that interested him. On all common sports he thought and talked a good deal. But in no sport had he attained much skill. His liking for games seemed to be far ahead of his expertness in them.

In more than one way, Bradshaw differed much from other men. He had no taste for tobacco in any form. Pipe or cigarette was never seen in his mouth. But from liquor he did not abstain. He was seldom absent from the canteen either at night or at midday issue, and he drank heavily at times. But though a habitual boozier, he always dodged the guard-room. By some obscure foxy instinct, he avoided the slippery stone where so many came to grief. Though more than once "wanted for the clink," somehow, or other, by luck or artifice, he escaped the clutches of the military police.

When the corporal had completed the entries in the guard report, Bradshaw put down his book, and entered into conversation with him. They were "townies," and they were Yorkshiremen, and often they drank beer quietly

together though such "familiarity" was known to be contrary to the letter and spirit of the K. R.

Thus were the guard occupied—some chatting, some playing cards—at the moment when the sentry outside suddenly cried "guard turn out!" Instantly we donned topees, grasped arms, tucked jacket skirts, and hurried out of the guard-room.

The call was for compliments to the highest command. "Clap"—"clap"—"clap"—the stately carriage of Lord Kitchener was approaching at a measured trot. There indeed were those two fine-stepping dark bays, "as like as two peas," driven masterfully by the Commander-in-Chief who was on the dickey, while his English groom, a man from a crack British cavalry regiment, sat with folded arms on the seat of honour in the body of the coach.

But in turning out, the guard was late by a moment, and consequently the salute for Lord Kitchener was not what it should have been. For a tuck or two to jackets and belts, and for a little deliberation, a few seconds more were needed. As it was the delivery of the salute was too hasty. The "present" being too hurried, lacked grace and "polish." For this imperfection the sentry was blamable. He had not been wideawake. He had allowed the commander-in-chief's carriage to approach too near before he shouted his warning to the guard.

But was Lord Kitchener concerned about the sentry's lack of vigilance, that ragged turn-out, and that imperfect salute? Not at all, apparently. As he passed out little party "at the present," he was looking forward directly and with almost stern intent over the horses' heads. And from him came no gesture in acknowledgment of our turn-out. His peak-capped head made not the lightest nod. He went by without the turn of an eye. He took no notice of us. Our guard and its compliments were ignored.

Some time after the commander-in-chief had passed by, while lounging about as I awaited my turn for sentry-go, I took closer stock of the guard-room.

This was a long, narrow, basement-like chamber that extended through the width of the ramparts alongside the arched gateway. Its walls were massive, and its floors were paved with rude brick slabs that had been worn hollow by the tread of thousands and thousands of ammunition-booted men. And that old worn floor as you gazed upon it, might well make you think of the countless troops that had done duty here from day to day, year to year, and generation to generation. And what a diversity of regiments had furnished

guards for this gate from the army of the East India Company and from the army of the Crown ?

Along each side of the guard-room was a row of bare bedsteads or "cots" of corrugated iron, which were infested with bugs. Dust lay everywhere, and in corners where it was least disturbed, and where cobwebs were to be seen, the hum of the mosquito could be heard. The whole interior had a dungeon-like air, and when the men of the guard were silent, and no vehicle was passing through the archway, the stillness was dismal.

At the back of the chamber light came through a narrow, barred opening, and through this you looked across the moat towards the ravelin, and obtained a view of a portion of the outer works of the Fort and of trees that grew on the grassy slopes. This corner was the quietest part of the guard-room. It was solitary, and seemed as if shunned by the guard. Here the spider was not molested, and it had spun with much industry.

Suspended from the wall in this still nook of dust, cobwebs, and mosquitoes, was a glazed frame that enclosed a large printed sheet of regulations or orders relating to Fort William. These did not directly concern the British garrison. My recollection is that they applied chiefly to menials and other Indians who worked in the Fort. The sheet was as large as a placard. The printed rules, or "orders" were many, and though some seemed trivial, they carried the weight of highest authority, for at the foot of the sheet stood the bold and conspicuous signature—"Kitchener F.M."

As I glanced down the sheet, and noted one or two quaint terms in the text, the thought occurred to me that, in substance, these rules or orders must have been as old as Fort William. The original draft from which they were derived could probably be traced back to the time when Clive's plan was achieved, when the new fortress was first garrisoned, and when it first became necessary to draw up rules applicable to natives employed within the limits of a military area that contained ten thousand troops, followers and petty traders.

The only bright part of the guard-room was the main entrance, which was sheltered by a wooden lean-to. This simple structure, which protected from sun and rain, and made the opening somewhat porch like, was embowered by a heavy growth of that tropical flowering creeper, the *bougainvillea*.

Now I wondered who may have been the person who first thought of creating a little beauty at the entrance to this old guard-room by planting a *bougainvillea*, in the expectation

that in due time it would flourish and yield adornment to a place where the eye needed relief from the view of austerity and shabbiness. And how long had this plant been beautifying this lean-to by its gay purple blooms and winning glances of admiration from every passer-by ?

Such was the subject of my musing at the moment when on hearing the striking of a gong away at the main guard, our commander called "next relief !" It was eleven o'clock, and my turn for sentry-go had come.

Those were not two tedious hours, and the time passed quickly. The duties of the sentry-post kept the mind occupied, and from observation of little things there was much to learn. Here too you had to be inquisitive, for every day all sorts of persons sought admission to Fort William, and it was the sentry's duty to find out what each individual's business might be. All passes had to be checked, all Indians not in military service had to be questioned, and any "doubtful or suspicious characters" had to be turned back.

But I was not always the questioner. Persons questioned me in turn. Many sought information from me—various people seeking direction to places in the Fort.

There were visitors who wanted to see Lord Kitchener or his secretary. There was a European civilian who asked to be directed to Royal Barracks. There was a man in uniform who wanted to know where in Fort William was the "Duke of Cumberland's Demi-Bastion." There was a visitor who inquired the way to the Arsenal, and another who sought the Treasury. There was a messenger with a bandbox addressed to some captain's wife, and accompanied with a *petit memoir* from a milliner. There was a repairer of musical instruments who flourished a bandmaster's address, and there was a man with a basket containing altar wine that had been despatched from a merchant in town to a garrison chaplain. And so many others.

The second hour of my sentry-go was much quieter than the first. Indeed at noon there was but little coming and going. It seemed as if most of the business of the day had then been despatched. And by this time too all drills had ceased. Parade grounds were vacant, and as it was now canteen time, a man from barracks had come over to inquire : "who wants beer ?"

After the midday meal and the visit of the orderly officer, the men of the guard, tired of reading cheap fiction, card-playing, and barrack gossip, lay down on their cots to doze away the time until their turns for duty. And the warm languid afternoon wore on till the hour of long shadows and yellow sunbeams. Towards sunset when we looked across



in the direction of the big barrack, we could see that the drummers of the regiment had assembled to beat Retreat. Their turn-out was smart, and they wore now not dull khaki topees, but well brushed blue forage caps with shiny crests. Their spirited performance with fife and drum awoke great cheer in the lines. They marched and counter-marched, and as they did so, they played, appropriately, "The Hour when Daylight Dies."

After we had turned out for Retreat, there ensued the change that takes place at this hour at every guard throughout India. For head-wear the forage cap now replaced the khaki helmet, or topee, and the sentry, handing over his rifle to the commander of the guard, received from him a smooth-bore musket and bayonet and five buckshot cartridges. These weapons no doubt were obsolete, but they were considered to be the safest and handiest means of defence for the sentry at night.

At tattoo, or 9-30, the time-gun thundered from the ramparts, the bugler sounded First Post, and the guard turned out. Then the gates were closed, but for an hour or so afterwards had to be opened again and again by the sentry in response to the call of "gate!—gate!" from persons returning to the Fort and seeking admission.

After last post my next turn for sentry-go came between 11 p.m., and 1 a.m., and these two hours were quiet and a little lonesome. It was a fine night. The sky was starry, and there was not a breath of air to move a leaf in the trees. The stillness within the ramparts was deep, and only now and again was it broken by cries of alarm from a crow roost disturbed by a squirrel. From beyond the Fort the sounds that now and again reached the sentry's ears were the chiming of tower clocks away in the city, and the striking of ships' bells on the Hooghly.

By midnight changed circumstances had made most of the sentry's orders dead letters. There was now no need for smart pacing up and down, no need to note whether some officer coming along was entitled to a "slope," or a "present," and no need to see that vehicles leaving the Fort by this gate "proceeded at a walking pace over the drawbridge and departed by the left sortie." There were now no hawkers' passes to be checked, and no visitors to be directed. Traffic through the gates of the citadel had ceased. The lines were deserted, and "lights out" had long since silenced the barracks. The orderly officer had paid his visit, the captain of the week had come and gone, Fort William was hushed in the dead of night, and Lord Kitchener and the garrison slumbered.

At one o'clock I tiptoed into the guard-room, and woke the man next for duty without disturbing the commander of the guard who was fast asleep. Thus, I believe, did sentries change places in the quiet lonesome hours between midnight and dawn at most guards and in similar circumstances. On the North West Frontier things were different. There, on the contrary, those late hours were the times for keenest alertness. But at remote down-country stations a guard commander probably slept through two reliefs before dawn. And if he did sleep on, and if the sentry on his beat smoked a cigarette, who in the world outside the guard was the wiser?

So here now when changing time came, I declined to break the corporal's sleep, and effected my relief without ceremony. When the gong was struck at the end of two hours, I approached a cot, touched a fellow's breast, and whispered to him the words: "next relief!" The man, who had been soundly sleeping, arose, rubbed his eyes, adjusted his belt and bandolier, lit a cigarette, and came out of the guard-room to the beat where musket, bayonet and cartridges changed hands. And quiet was the moment of that change, and deep was the hush that lay upon Fort William whose green leafy trees had the solemn stillness of statues.

At five o'clock I was again on sentry-go. Then the freshness of dawn was in the air, and the birds were greeting the light with their chirping. Early workers were already astir. Some were knocking at the gate for admission, and the first to enter was a jemadar (scavenger) who was accompanied by his daughter, a little girl, who wore a shawl over her head and was adorned with anklets, armlets, noserings and earrings. Next there came *napits*, or barbers, who every morning shaved men in barracks while they still lay in bed. And other menials and hawkers continued to knock for admission till reveille was sounded.

Then the gates were opened for the day, and soon after the opening a passenger vehicle rumbled over the draw-bridge. This was not a tumtum, *bund-gari*, or phaeton, but a carriage of much rarer type—a brougham. And the occupant of the brougham was the Catholic chaplain who was coming to celebrate mass in the picturesque little church among the shady trees across the way. The padre, who was a Belgian missionary father, after acknowledging my salute in the military manner, greeted me with a cheery "good morning, sentry! And at that hour those kindly words from the padre fell pleasantly upon the spirit.

Fort William was now awake and stirring. Little movements here and there signified that the military day's work

had begun. The "dress" for the first regimental parade had sounded. It was now the time when there was much hurrying in and out of washing places with soap and towel in hand, and when men for parade with not a moment to spare, hurriedly drank "gunfire" coffee from enamelled mugs. The "dress" for the first regimental parade had sounded. Ration-carts, watched by rapacious kite-hawks, had rumbled into the Fort. The sun was gaining strength, and the crows had begun their cawing.

Time now seemed to be passing quickly, and many things reminded us that our duty would soon be over. Our twenty-fourth hour had arrived. Away in the distance, in the shade of trees, the new guards had already fallen in for that parade that every morning drew many eyes upon it.

While the guards stood stock still under close inspection, curious onlookers from the verandahs of the big barrack gazed down upon those two trim ranks of men who might be regarded as participants in a little regimental competition. In neatness, spickness, and smartness, who would be judged worthiest this morning? Who would be the lucky fellow to gain the stick?

At length came the moment for the announcement. A hush fell upon the parade. The spectators on the verandahs for a second held their breaths. The adjutant, having inspected the last man, turned and walked away some distance from the ranks, and in an undertone communicated his decision to the battalion sergeant. The latter proclaimed the award—"Fall out, Private so-and-so, and take the waiting man's place."

The named private did as ordered, and the waiting man, the extra, or supernumerary man, standing on the left flank, dispossessed of his privilege, went and took the place in the ranks vacated by his rival. So now the tension was released, now curiosity was appeased. So-and-so had won the stick and for him would be no two-on-and-four-off.

"March off!" orders the adjutant. A subaltern salutes, and places himself in front of the main guard. A bright blade with a "wheel" leaps from a scabbard. A little drummer boy sturdily steps in front of the officer. "Main guard!—By the left!—" commands the subaltern with his sword at the "carry." Then from corporals come commands to other guards for Fort William—Plassey Gate, Water Gate, Treasury Gate, Chowringhee Gate—All march off and that solitary "half file," the winner of the "stick," is dismissed by the battalion sergeant.

So now our relief was approaching. "Stand by!" said the corporal. We turn out for the last time, and in a

moment are confronted by the new guard for the performance of a little ceremony that had been repeated at this spot from day to day and year to year, perhaps ever since the time when Governor Warren Hastings, accompanied by John Belli Esquire, passed through this archway to view with pleasure the plenitude of his great granary in Fort William.

We salute the new guard. We indeed give the new guard a fine salute, a "present" ever so much smarter than that which we gave Lord Kitchener the day before. The new guard returns compliments. Sentries are changed. Orders are read. The guard-room's scant property is taken over, and a fresh signature is appended to the guard report with that same scratchy pen.

We march away to a final salute from our successors, and we feel bright and hearty. We had accomplished nothing to mention—nothing out of the way of garrison routine. We had but guarded one gate of this citadel for twenty-four hours, but that little duty we believed we had done very well, and now uppermost in our minds was the thought that we were finished for the day.

## CHAPTER V

### RULE OF MAN AND POWER OF THE SUN: A REGIMENT DAY BY DAY

IN the days that followed the performance of that duty described in the preceding chapter, the sun shone with greater power, and now we saw how the advance of the hot weather had begun to influence the ordering of military affairs. It had indeed already affected the supreme command. Lord Kitchener with his staff had departed for his cool retreat among the Simla hills. A little later the brigadier went on leave, and during his absence the senior colonel of the garrison held the command. Our own commanding officer also took leave, and the senior major assumed temporary command of the regiment.

Life within Fort William was now a little easier, and, as someone remarked, it looked as if the absence of the cat had emboldened the mice. Discipline of course prevailed, but its bonds were not so taut, and there was less ceremony. The adjutant no longer inspected the guards. That duty was now performed by the orderly officer. Time and place for certain duties were adjusted to the weather; company parades were often held indoors, and if held outside barracks when the sun was strong, instruction was given in the shade of trees. Men were adapting themselves to the climate as they best could, and were learning much from experience of the various tropical maladies of which fresh European man had to take account.

Dress too was changed to suit the weather. For common duties khaki was still worn, but for church and for walking out, the dress was now white cotton drill—cool for wear, but easily marred by a stain. In barracks, when off duty, men wore flimsy cotton singlets, and “knicks,” or what are now called “shorts.” Parades and physical exercises caused heavy sweats and raised thirsts. Great was the consumption of iced drinks, and as the weather grew sultrier and perspir-

ing increased, many became afflicted with prickly heat. Indeed to some men this malady had become a torment, and relief was sought in repeated shower baths, the use of patent soaps, and frequent visits to the garrison swimming pool.

As somebody had drolly said, "the heat was everywhere now." It was the time when snakes came out of the earth for coolness, and when the heat drove buffaloes mad. It was the time when reports of remarkable temperatures appeared in the newspapers, when a fierce sun drove the people off bazar streets in Sind, Rajputana, and the Punjab; when drought afflicted cultivation and wells dried, when the ryot in the fields looked with longing eyes for those clouded skies that tell that the monsoon is coming to bring relief to man and beast, and to refresh and fertilise the land.

Yet this too was the season when every *maidan*, and every fertile tract, became a verdant expanse, and the foliage of the forests appeared in luxuriance of richest green. Now it was that both garden and jungle brought forth blooms of beauty and sweet scents, now the flowering trees of the country evoked admiration, and in the grounds of many a bungalow that famous shrub, the "Queen of the Night," perfumed the still air in the hours of darkness.

And now someone may ask how the regiment passed the time from morning till sunset during this hot season. Well, the day's work began say, at six o'clock, when reveille was sounded, and about three-quarters of an hour later the first parade was held. This might be one day a commanding officer's parade, another day an adjutant's drill, and another a sergeant-major's drill. And on days when this first parade was not regimental, companies were said to be at the disposal of their commanders.

After breakfast there was only one parade and that was usually a company affair. As decided by the captain, it might be a parade for company drill, or for musketry, or for instruction at semaphore. It might also be a bathing parade, a kit inspection, or a lecture. But whatever it might be, it was over usually by eleven o'clock, and then, unless called upon for some special duty, a man was deemed to be "finished for the day." Beds might then be made down in the dormitories. And a made-down cot was needed to rest upon, to chat with another man, or to play a game of cards.

At noon the canteen opened for an hour, but instead of going there, a man, if he chose, could have his pint of beer in the barrack-room, to which the liquor was fetched for those who ordered it. At one o'clock came the mid-day meal, and after this most of the men lay on their cots and dozed away the sultry afternoon. Owing to the heat there was

little walking out till five o'clock, by which time the sun's power had lessened. Then, too, outdoor games could be played, and on the ground in front of the principal barrack the booting of the football at kick-about or side games went on till dusk.

And if on any evening no game or practice at football was going on within the Fort, and the barracks were quiet, you could tell from this circumstance that most of the men had gone off to the city's chief playground, the Maidan, there to watch and cheer the regiment's team playing against one of the fancied civilian teams of Calcutta in a league or tournament competition. These contests, in the height of the hot weather, and even in the sultriest afternoons, drew great crowds, and they emptied our barracks.

For football there was indeed great enthusiasm in the regiment. It was the subject oftenest talked about and argued about. And most of the regiment's reading was "football." That was the subject uppermost in the mind of the average man who went to the reading room "to have a look at the papers." There, not until he had read all the news of the great popular game in the Home country, of the fortunes of this team and that, of "star players," and record "games," would the reader turn the page and look for other news.

Though men had plenty of leisure, not many book-readers were to be seen in barrack-rooms during the day. And the regiment's library indicated a demand for only one class of book. The stock of fiction was abundant. It included most of the great novels published within the period that extended from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. There were also on the shelves a few military biographies and memoirs, but the library furnished nothing for the student. A visitor who took up the catalogue would look in vain for a book, say, on elementary science, or mathematics, or geography. Anyone seeking books of this kind would be advised to look in the garrison library, which was near at hand and on the same floor.

Now the reason why the regimental library provided no books for "serious reading," was probably because it was supposed that there were then no "serious readers" in the regiment. But though there may have been grounds for that belief, it was evident, however, that the bulk of the regiment had some taste for reading that imparted in a way a good deal of knowledge. Light the matter might be, but it informed so far as it went.

This matter was sought not in books, but in handy weekly journals that were bound in coloured covers. These were

always in demand. They were the most read of all the publications that were to be found on the tables of the reading room. Copies received by mail from parents or friends passed from hand to hand in the barrack-room, and they used to be taken on guard to be read in the intervals between reliefs. The same publications were read by men of the British navy, and they might be seen in many hands among civilians in the Home country travelling in trains and buses to factories, shops and offices. These were the "journals for the million" that brought wealth, power and honours to their owners.

But though our reading was not deep or various, we were not to be judged on that account. We were not a Philistine regiment. We liked in a way some of the things that people of taste and learning liked. Entertainments that attracted the best, attracted us, and drew money from our pockets, though it might be for only tickets to a gallery. We were a regiment of theatre-goers, and we could listen with pleasure to the music of fine operas; and though not one in our thousand was an expert in a classical tongue, we could point to men who could play classical music, and could talk with knowledge of the works of the great masters. And though you might never see a man on his cot reading Bacon, or Milton, or Burke, you might see a full house watching a play of Shakespeare's at the garrison theatre.

And now to what has been said relating to the manner in which the regiment generally spent the hours of daylight, there may be added a word or two to indicate how the time was spent from retreat till "lights out."

Among places within the ramparts to which a man might resort of an evening, there was, first of all, the Outram Institute. On the ground floor of that building was the coffee shop and supper bar. On the upper floor was the recreation room, where billiards, chess, draughts, and other games might be played. But at night seldom were many to be seen in that recreation room, and few also were those who visited the reading room next door.

Away on the other side of the main barrack, and on a level with its first floor, was a little temperance institute where refreshments could be obtained, games could be played, and papers read. But no crowd went over there of an evening. With us temperance had not yet become popular. Shoulders were shrugged at the mention of the "A.T.A." In those days, and before drafts from Home joined us, not five true teetotallers could be found in any company of the Gosling Greens.



For those who sought diversion outside Fort William there were some temptations. Once out in the freedom beyond the ramparts of an evening, it seemed as if the languid air whispered seduction in the ears of some town-going men, and that the twinkling lights beyond the Maidan were beckoning to curious and mysterious places in the city. And once in that region, once beyond Chowringhee, there was some danger of a man's will yielding to strong beer, of "chucking an absence," and venturing in places out of bounds where a fellow would be nabbed by the garrison police. But as the penalty for such rashness was "cells," men generally were wary, and transgressors were few.

But even on nights after a good pay-out, when attraction to the city was strongest, the number of town-goers was small compared with the number who stayed in barracks, and who, some time or other in the hours between Retreat and Post, repaired to that roystering club of the private—that Canteen which is described in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### NIGHT IN THE BASEMENT

THE canteen for the British infantry regiment in Fort William did not occupy a separate building, or a building in part or entirely designed for the purpose. It occupied but a corner of the basement of that great barrack which has been described in another chapter. It seemed but a makeshift of a place, and it had not stage, or piano, or other things that might be seen in other canteens.

But it was a fact that this was not the only place in Fort William where a man of the regiment could obtain beer. At certain hours beer with meals was served at the regimental coffee shop, and that was a far decenter place than the canteen. There a man could sit on a chair instead of a bench, and be served with a glass instead of a mug, and there the odours did not put one in mind of the maltster's business.

This coffee shop was established in no building of mean association. It was a building notable on account of its former condition. Tradition gave it dignity. It was once the abode of the highest in the land. It had been built for the residence of the Governor-General of Bengal, and a marble tablet on its wall recorded that it was sometimes occupied by the Governor-General. It was indeed the Presidency's Government House for a period, and it was here with due ceremony, that Cornwallis and Wellesley took the oath, and in robes of state assumed their high offices.

Time had brought great changes since the days of Cornwallis and Wellesley, and it came to pass that this former state residence in the heart of Fort William became a garrison institute that contained a library and reading-room, a recreation room, and a supper bar where Tommy Atkins could have a glass of beer with a meal.

But the supper bar on the ground floor of that historic building did not after all attract a great many men who

"liked a pint." It seemed all very well in a way, but for the beer-drinker the place for drinking was still the regimental canteen, the "wet canteen." There most of the men of the regiment resorted day by day and night by night, to sit and talk and drink till "taps" sent them to their barrack-rooms.

How long the canteen had been established in that corner of the basement of the great barrack, was a question which nobody in our time attempted to answer. But by reflecting for a moment, and by reasoning, from signs, you might suppose that it had been there with little or no change for a great many years, and perhaps for decades.

The aspect of the place was repulsive. But it lost no patronage on that account. However unsightly, it was still the canteen, and being so, it drew the crowd, drew the bulk of the regiment. Ever since the time when first a beer barrel was tapped here, it had probably been attracting men as a honey pot attracts flies. For decades it must have been drawing overflowing houses. Here regiment after regiment of men had had their chat and song, and beery argument night by night, till on change of station they went their way whithersoever the fates had called them.

The canteen faced eastwards, and the open arches on that side gave it access, air and light. For doors there was no need. For security there was no necessity. Portable property of value there was none. Consequently this portion of the basement area was open day and night, and at all hours it was used as a passage from one side of the building to the other. If a stranger approaching from the parade ground inquired how he might get to the other side of the barrack, he would be directed to an entrance at the end of the building and told to "go through the canteen." And the stranger following the direction, and passing through low archways in thick massive walls, and seeing the stone-flagged floor, the rude trestle-tables and benches, and a tapped barrel tilted behind a rounded piece of counter, might well murmur to himself: "what a queer place for a canteen!"

On the western side, or the side next the parade ground, the canteen had no outlook, as the archways were "blinded." On the eastern side, or front, the archways opened into a triangular courtyard, on one side of which were the regimental kitchens or "cook-houses," as they are called.

From the upper floors of the barrack the descent into this courtyard was by a wooden stairway which was fixed in such a way that it looked like a gangway let down from the side of a huge ship. And as it led directly from the verandah above to the canteen entrance below, this stairway was a

convenience to those who might have "exceeded their measure." With the support of the railing the private who may have had one pint too many, could struggle up these stairs and gain the freedom of the barrack-room; and it was said that some commanding officer (with these stairs in mind) once dropped a hint at orderly room, that it would be far safer for a man to have his liquor in this canteen than to go into town where an unsteady tippler leaving a bar risked apprehension by the garrison police.

Familiar was this canteen to me. I knew it as well as any other man in the regiment. I visited the place many and many a night, and often in the hearty company of chums did I stay out the time till the clock reached the stroke of 9-30, and the canteen sergeant's cane beat upon the table. But all that I heard and saw at these many hilarious "sessions" is not matter for this book. I need but recall the canteen scene on one night only, and concerning that one night I believe I am competent to narrate from sure recollection.

To begin with, then, on this evening that my memory has underlined, the canteen had opened at the regular time, which was 6-30, and as usually happened at the opening hour, a group of old soldiers were those for whom the first pints were drawn. Those first-comers were bronzed and seasoned men whose medal ribbon attested service in African and other campaigns. Some of them were senior bandsmen, and some had been corporals or sergeants at one time or other, and as old sweats they were a set apart. They kept to themselves, and they occupied the same table night after night.

For the first half hour after the opening it was a dull canteen. Conversation among the few old sweats was low and subdued. The barman had little to do. The canteen sergeant, who was a young man, sauntered up and down, pursed his lips for a whistle now and again, gave an occasional tuck to the skirt of his jacket and tapped his thigh with a cane. He was finding duty dull, and was wishing that time would pass a little more quickly. It was yet so early. The swallows were still on the wing, and the crows had not yet ceased their cawing on the trees of Fort William. Over the way, the cookhouses had not yet closed, but some of the native cooks were folding their *pugris*, putting on their *chupkans*, and stowing things away for the night.

By and by the canteen gathers custom. More men have come in with their drinking mugs slung from their jacket hooks, and the barman is now having a little more to do. The quietness and reserve have passed, for now two more "schools" are present. Talk has become more animated,

second fillings have loosened tongues, and a buz of conversation rises from the tables.

An hour passes. The men, oppressed by the sultriness, have taken off their khaki jackets. The swallows have disappeared. The cawing of the crows has languished among the trees. Dusk gathers, and lights are switched on. The cockhouses are locked, and the cooks have departed, having stolen away in that ghostly manner in which Indian menials vanish in the twilight.

The canteen is filling up. The hum of conversation is rising. The barman has now not an idle moment; his hand is repeatedly on the tap. More and more mugs are being pushed across the counter; more and more coin—copper, nickel, and silver—is being flicked into the till—and again and again rupees ring on that testing stone that is so necessary in a land of counterfeiters.

All benches are now occupied. The volume of utterance has swollen, and great is the sultriness in this crowded basement chamber, for it is the time of radiation. Now are those stout walls giving off the heat absorbed during the hours of powerful sun. And strong is the odour of the malted liquor that pervades this sweltering space.

There are now two men behind the counter, and they have plenty of work upon their hands. They are already flushed and perspiring, and to do their work the better, and without mistakes, they have divided their labours. One has become server, and the other cashier. And this proves a good arrangement. Now doing but one thing at a time, the one server exhibits fine quickness and deftness of hand. He fills great bunches of pots at a time, spills no liquor, and gives true measure, with the dexterity of an attendant at a Bavarian *biergarten*. His fellow-worker too has proved his capability. He has shown quickness in the faculty of mental arithmetician and cashier. And wary must be the man on this job at this busy hour, for every coin tendered may not have come from the Mint, and every currency note may not bear the water-mark of the Government of India.

Late-comers now look in vain for a seat. The canteen overflows. Men squat on the floor around the archways with their backs supported by the walls. These are individuals or pairs "on the steady." They are men who drink moderately, and talk in low tones. The groups, the "schools," and the cliques, having come in early, occupy the tables. Among them drinking is heaviest and talk is loudest.

But not every man here tonight is a member of the regiment. The canteen has at least one visitor, and he is in mufti. He is no longer in the army. His military service

ended long ago. He was an old campaigner. Forty years had passed since he wore the uniform of his regiment, and during this period he had been employed in some post or other in the country.

This veteran had not turned in casually to have a drink. He had been invited by a man of the regiment who had made his acquaintance when out in town. They were natives of the same English county, and when they met by chance they discovered this fact by recognising each other's accent. That recognition at once put them on familiar terms, and the young soldier soon came to know that his fellow-countryman was a veteran of the Indian Mutiny, and that he had been a member of that small but heroic force that held out on the Ridge of Delhi, and that eventually stormed and re-captured the city.

Surviving combatants of that campaign had already become scarce. Men of the Great Mutiny had become rare, and their fewness gave them the greater distinction. In the rank of relative honour, time had put the wearer of the Mutiny medal at the right of the line. The medal had become the most precious of military decorations. People glanced at a breast that glittered with medals awarded for their services, but when they came face to face with an old man wearing that "1875" ribbon, they felt as if they owed the wearer a bow of reverence.

Hence the distinction of this visitor in mufti who had been quietly conducted into the canteen tonight. He was a man of middle height and light build, loosely clad in a white cotton suit. His coat, waistcoat, collar and tie looked as if they had been made for ease, and the topee, or sunhat, which he had been wearing was remarkable for its broadness.

Though now far advanced in years, he was hale and vigorous. His hair was white and scanty, but his complexion was fresh and ruddy, and his grey, bluish eyes were alert and straightforward. Though a man of the past, though full of the sentiment of bygone days, yet he liked to chat with the rising generation, and he could readily make himself at home with the young. But in this canteen he did not court an audience. He had not come to "tell the tale," and his sole auditor for some time was his friend, or host, as he seemed to be. And the talk between the two was in a quiet tone and was not intended for other ears.

But the head-to-head chat of the young man in khaki, and the old man in mufti, could not be kept up for long in such a place. The veteran was conspicuous. In dress, in looks, and age he was a strange and singular man to be seen at a canteen table. Many eyes were upon him, and all who

saw him must have guessed that his career must have brought him much variety of experience, and that his memory carried many stories. So it happened that after some time, not one but several were listening to the old man's words.

According to his own account he had suffered many hard knocks. From boyhood till past middle age, he had known but the rough side of life. He had been born to struggle, it seemed, and by struggle he had been tempered and toughened. He had known what soldiering was in the hard days when John Company still ruled. He had been through the most trying campaign in the Indian Mutiny, and the name and fame of that campaign were borne by one word—"Delhi."

Well did the veteran know what this spelt. That thrilling chapter of military history he knew by heart. He knew it from beginning to end because he had been a participant in the campaign from beginning to end. From clear memories left by sharp experiences he had the story of Delhi at the tip of his tongue.

That story pursued the course of events from that day in early June when Barnard's column, arriving from the north, took up a position on the Ridge, there to be the besieged rather than the besieger, there to be the defender rather than the attacker, but there to hold its ground under the unceasing fire of an enemy ten times stronger in numbers, and far better armed and munitioned. And from week to week did it hold out and beat off attack after attack till that day in mid September, when, weakened by casualties and sickness, and seeing the perils of its position, its commanders in council resolved to take Delhi by assault—that is with a force of 5,000 troops to storm and recapture a city, the fortified walls of which were held by a sepoy army of 30,000, armed to the teeth. And within three days that feat was achieved, to the surprise of India, and to the joy and relief of millions.

Speak of those days to the veteran, mention Delhi, or its Ridge, and you touched the spring of his bosom recollections. He had a talent for recalling "Fifty-seven," and his experience he could recount with fine fluency. And he had not been long in this canteen when a young Tommy, gazing at his medal ribbon, asked a question that set him going. And once set going, the beer and the conviviality gave stimulus to his narrative faculty. As he went on, more eyes were fixed upon him, and soon he had gained the attention of the whole table.

With cheeks now aglow, he continued to deliver a stream of reminiscence that brought to mind with striking effect, the career of a field force that had saved the imperilled *Sirkar's* dominion and made history. He told afresh the story of the most thrilling episode of the Indian Mutiny, and that in a version illumined with details that had been skipped by historians and memoirists.

For an hour the old man had his audience, but after that hour had passed, he had fewer listeners. The time had come when the most entertaining of men fails to hold the ear of the canteen. When the visitor first entered and sat down at that table, it was not yet seven o'clock. Now it was nearly nine, and it was not the same canteen. The noise had increased. Men were raising their voices higher and higher to make themselves heard, and what two hours before had been no more than a faint murmur, was now a clamour audible to a sentry over on the ramparts. Now was the canteen in full tongue. Now was intoxication giving most vehement expression to sentiment and opinion. Now had little matters in little minds grown to magnificence, and so the canteen had become vociferous and boisterous.

"Order, gentlemen, now!—the best of order! A respectful hearin' for a Mutiny veteran. Let's hear, gentlemen, from an old campaigner the story of the force that held the Ridge of Delhi, and that suffered and fought and at last took Delhi at odds of seven to one. Let's hear about the rough soldierin' of the old days. Let's hear from a man who was there all about the last charge that relieved Delhi—let's hear how Nicholson fell."

Such was the appeal of a private who had the eloquence of a showman. But from this fellow with the commanding voice, a call for order, with a rapping on the table, was in vain. It was too late. The canteen had become a roaring babel. Now was no time for reminiscence. The veteran's narration was drowned. His measured recital could now no more be heard than mild words uttered amid the din in the storming of Delhi.

The demand for beer is greatest at this moment, and those two men behind the counter, the sultriest nook in the building, are pressed to their wits' end. The cheeks of both potman and cashier have grown ruddier with the night, and their necks and chests stream with perspiration. But they are not the only men with moist skins in this basement. The whole canteen-ful of red-faced men is in a sweat. There is not a dry shirt or singlet to be seen anywhere about.

The canteen sergeant, in manner, is not now the same sergeant that came on duty before the swallows had departed. His expression has become mellowed, and there is a slight



flush upon his cheek. Instead of fingering his downy moustache, he mops his brow now and again with a handkerchief. He has had a quiet pint or two already, and to pass the time away, he converses at intervals with a solitary private, a "steady file," who is seated at the end of a bench in the shadow of an arch. But wary to duty is this young sergeant. He is acutely mindful of the fact that the canteen's long drinking session is drawing to a close. It is past nine, and farther past than many about there are aware. This being the sergeant's prime concern at the moment, he is mentally reckoning the lapse of minutes. He leaves the private, walks away for a little distance, then enters the canteen, stands near the counter, and shouts the customary warning: "Five minutes!"

On the road on the other side of the barrack, the drummers are standing about, and some of them are fidgetting with their instruments. They are waiting to sound a call in unison, and it is one of those nights when they beat Post. A gunner from the garrison artillery company has already passed up the slopes of the ramparts, and has taken his post beside the time gun. And the guards at all the gates of Fort William are getting ready.

In a moment the signal that gives true time to Calcutta's million is flashed from the timeball tower. The big gun pointed towards the city is fired from the ramparts with a thunderous report that shakes Fort William. Clive's citadel shivers on its silt bed. Tea cups rattle on saucers. Birds are startled in their roosts, and dogs bark. The buglers sound First Post, and the canteen sergeant vigorously strikes a table with a cane and shouts "Time!"

The sweltering basement chamber empties. The unsteady assemblage rises and shuffles away from tables that are stained with beer spillings, and strewn with cigarette ends. The Mutiny veteran is conducted out of Fort William by his fellow-countryman. The potman and cashier, glad for their relief, thoroughly mop their faces with towels. The till, with the night's "takings," is placed in safe deposit. The lights are extinguished, and the canteen, charged with odours of beer and tobacco, is left in darkness and silence.

On the other side of the barrack there is music of fife and drum. There, beating Post, the drummers are playing "The Wind that shakes the Barley." But the strains of this melody are drowned by noise within the building, for those beery men who have just clambered up these wooden stairs have brought the clamour of the canteen into the dormitories, where, clustered on many a cot, they continue their confused debates till commanded to silence and repose by the sounding of the call that proclaims the close of the military day.

## CHAPTER VII

### A BAR IN BOUNDS

TEN weeks after the arrival of the regiment, when the month of April was drawing to an end, I had been asleep on my cot in the big barrack in Fort William during the afternoon of a hot day, when, awakened by the shout of men watching a football match, I looked around, and saw that a white cotton suit, fresh from the launderer, had been placed on the top of my kit box.

This was something pleasing to see. "White" was then the dress for walking out, and it put in my mind the thought of an evening ramble outside the citadel. That thought grew. I gave the matter reflection. By sunset my mind was made up. I put on that white suit and decided to take a walk into town.

When I reached the great park, or *Maidan*, that extends from the Fort to the city, I saw many Europeans going about bareheaded, for no need for head cover was there now. The great heat and glare were past. The evening had brought relief, and a fresh, light breeze from the south-west was blowing across the verdant expanse. So now Calcutta's leading residents, after a sweltering day, had come forth to "eat the air," as they say in India, to play, or to drive along the Maidan roads and by the riverside.

And Calcutta at this period drove out not in automobiles, but in horse-*garris*. The motor-car was still rare, and people stared at it. The business of the coach-builder, the harness-maker, and the shoemsmith, still flourished. Everybody who was anybody owned a horse and phaeton, or tum-tum, and in the evening joined in the gay parade of equipages that moved to and fro along the Strand Road, past the Hooghly with its picturesque shipping, and past the Eden Gardens, where a band played to a thronged promenade.

Having viewed this evening parade as I went along, I strolled about the European parts of the city for about an

hour, and then made for the street in which was situated a bar which was in bounds for the garrison, and was known for short as the "T.B."

This was a bright and clean little place. Any European passing by might turn in there, to rest and mop his brow and call for a glass of beer which would be served by a smartly-dressed *khidmatgar*. Though it was a garrison bar, many of its patrons were not wearers of the khaki, or white, or scarlet *wardi* of the services. At times indeed it had more civil than military visitors. And among both landsmen and mariners who went there, might be met men who had knocked about the world a good deal, and who, in the pursuit of some skill or some peculiar aptitude, had been drawn into occupations that had given them strange experiences or adventures. And so the chances were that some night or other you might go up a narrow staircase, turn into a little terrace, sit down there, and in the company of a man you had never seen before, stay out the time maybe till the bar closed. Then you would come downstairs carrying in your head some little gain to the sum of your knowledge, for here strangers were frank, and their tongues were without the curb of conceit.

Many words are not needed to describe this bar. The place from which the liquor was fetched by the waiter was out of sight to visitors. The billiard-room was on the first floor, and on the same level, overlooking the street, and carried over the sidewalk by stanchions, was a small terrace which was furnished with some marble tables, some chairs, and two divans that were placed against the balustrade.

At the moment when I entered there was only one person on this terrace, and he was a civilian. He was a middle-aged man of full, fresh features, and he was dressed in a white cotton suit of loose cut. His back was partly turned towards the street, and as he meditatively smoked a pipe, his gaze was directed towards the wall at the back of the terrace. This wall was illuminated by an electric bulb, the light of which fell on the leaves of a flowering creeper.

Although the man continued to gaze stedfastly at these objects, I could perceive that his mind was occupied with some other matter. He was, I believed, giving that other matter deepest thought at the moment. My presence did not in the least disturb his meditation. Although I was seated near him, he took no notice of me, but continued regarding the flowering creeper, smoking his pipe, and now and then taking a draught from a glass of beer.

For some time we two were the only occupants of the terrace. Then came a third. A ship's quartermaster entered, sat down at the opposite parapet of the terrace, took off his

cap, wiped away—perspiration with a handkerchief, and unfolded a newspaper. He called for a glass of beer, and had scarcely been served when he was joined by an acquaintance. The waiter, a Moslem, wearing a scarlet sash and a green pugri, was called again, the newspaper was put away, and the pair entered into a hearty chat, in the manner of fellow-shipmen.

After a little while two more men came into the terrace, and they also were from a ship. But they were shipmen of another class. They were men of the fo'c's'le, but they were decently garbed. They had made themselves presentable in shore togs. The fo'c's'le was disguised by collars and ties of sorts.

Now there were six men on the terrace, and a little later there were seven, and the seventh was no other than my friend, Bradshaw, who, like myself, having been rambling round the town for some time, decided, as he said, "to finish up in the 'T.B.'". He was flushed, perspiring and thirsty, and his first draught of the beer with which he was served, almost emptied his glass. Then, refreshed and comforted, he chatted away with me on petty barrack affairs till the entrance of two more visitors to the T.B. attracted our attention.

These two men were greatly unlike in age, in looks, and in dress. One, as we found out later from his talk, had come from a tea plantation in the wilds of Assam. His companion was an old man of singular appearance, and of a type then rarely seen in any bar in Calcutta. Time, and the pursuit of his own conservative notions had given him oddness and strangeness of manner, looks, and garb. His beard was long and grey. He wore a broad, old-fashioned topee, a loose khaki coat which was unbuttoned, a shirt wide open at the neck, breeches of the Jodhpur pattern, and strong boots of the type usually worn by sportsmen and planters.

Having taken stock of the newcomers as they sat down near us, and gave their orders to the *khidmatgar*, Bradshaw, reverting to shop, or to military matters, mentioned a lecture on Fort William that had been given by some officer of the garrison. He said that he had been taught much by this lecture. Before he had received instruction in this way he had known very little about the Fort. In fact he had not known much more than that the Fort had six gates and a sally-port.

Now that quiet, reflective beer-drinker of whom I have spoken, was sitting so near us that he clearly heard every word that Bradshaw had spoken. And it seemed that what Bradshaw had just said had broken the spell of his musing.

Bradshaw evidently had said something that he felt he could not let pass without correction, or some expression of opinion, or communication of knowledge. So, altering the position of his chair, the stranger turned partly towards us, cleared his throat for speech, and asked us to excuse his interruption.

He then informed us that besides the gates mentioned by Bradshaw, there was at least one other way of getting into and out of Fort William. He did not wonder that we had not known about it as it was not open to view. It was an underground passage. To this the entrance in the Fort was marked by a small structure, which, though situated in an open area, was hardly ever noticed. Perhaps not one in ten thousand persons passing by would ever ask : "what is that for ?"

The manner of the civilian had now entirely changed. Far different was he now from the man I had taken him to be when I first saw him. He had become sprightly, convivial, and full of talk. It was as if he had said to himself : "away with gravity, away with meditation and thinking that hurts the spirit." Now the pipe was no longer in his mouth, and he had so altered the position of his chair that he was now face to face with us.

Bradshaw asked him how he came to know about the underground passage to the Fort. "Well," said he, "by chance I once saw it getting cleaned out by a gang of coolies. And that was a big job. You should have seen the stuff they got out of it. And the snakes—it was full of snakes ! It looked as if it had never been cleaned since the days of Lord Wellesley. Many of the coolies I heard went down with malaria while the work was on. So you can imagine there were plenty of mosquitoes about."

After a little more talking, Bradshaw, when a break occurred, asked : "How did we first get here ?"—that is, how did the English first come to establish settlements in India ?

The civilian had no ready answer for this question. He was held to a pause, but that we soon perceived did not indicate lack of knowledge, but rather his depth of thought on the matter. His ideas were not in order for ready utterance, or he had not at the moment words in the precise form in which he wanted to deliver his views.

"How did we get here ?" he repeated after a little reflection. "Well, I should say that it all came about by err-muddling, haphazard doings of men sent out by a chartered trading company. And I think we would be right in supposing that some, if not all, of these first adventurers had more

of the character of buccaneers than chevaliers. However, come they did somehow and got a footing."

There was another pause, and then, in effect, he said: "But to my mind we should never have come here. A European nation should have as little to do with India as possible—not more perhaps than trading with her seaports. India is not for the White Man. The European dies out in India. Everybody knows that, and the lesson from the fact is plain. It shows us that a European power should have settlements only in regions that are fit to maintain the white race in its full vigour and purity."

After these opening remarks, the civilian poured forth a stream of opinions, and it was plain now that the question put to him by Bradshaw had touched a subject on which his mind was rich in ideas obtained by reading, seeing, hearing and thinking. And his views were delivered to most attentive ears. We were young, we were fresh to the country, and we were ignorant. But our minds were open, and waited on plain knowledge from whomsoever it might be gained, whether from the lecturer in the garrison library, or from the glib tongue of some chance acquaintance met at a bar in bounds. So, wide-eyed and open-mouthed we listened to this informative and fluent man with the flush from potent ale upon his healthy cheek.

But we lost the company of this entertaining civilian sooner than we expected. Indeed his parting with us was abrupt. It came about when, at the prompt of a sudden thought, the man slipped his right hand into the left pocket of his waistcoat, and took out his watch. The result of that quick reference to time was manifest. From the serious look that passed over his countenance, it was evident that the watch had told him where he should then be as imperatively as if a commanding voice had spoken.

He arose at once, muttered apologies, and having bid us good night and put his pipe in his pocket, was gone in an instant. And well was his departure noted by those who were sitting near us. They had heard a great deal of his talk, and now their eyes took the man's measure as he turned his back and made for the stairs. But only from the tea planter was comment uttered. He remarked after a moment's silence: "Somebody it seems who has used his eyes and ears well since he has been in this country."

By this time the Moslem waiter in the green pugri and scarlet sash had responded to several calls, and pocketed as many petty pourboires. Talk had become freer. Everybody on the terrace was now heartier, and every cheek had a higher colour. And thus the night wore on. In the street

below passing *garis* were few, and the tramcars going by at quicker pace on unobstructed tracks, were almost empty. The perspiring crowd that had poured into the street and sought cold drinks during an interlude at a neighbouring Indian theatre, had gone back to its seats. And as the noise of traffic and the murmur of crowds abated, the chiming of the quarters came clearer from the church clock over the way. The voice of the muezzin from a minaret could now be heard farther away. And in the dim area of flat roofs in the distance, the thumping of a drum, and the strains of plaintive Indian music also sounded louder as the streets quietened.

Some time after, our civilian friend had departed, the companion of the planter, the old man who was sitting near, turning towards us, said: "I heard your friend who was talking to you a while ago mention snakes, but I suspect he had never had the experience with snakes that I've had. I could tell you a lot about snakes. Reptiles, species of reptiles, and the ways of reptiles—that at one time used to be one of my pet subjects. Every time I heard a reptile story, I used to jot down the main facts in my notebook, and whenever I came across a story in a newspaper, I always used to cut it out. Oh, you should see the collection of cuttings I have in my musty old drawer—some of them have been there for more than forty years."

Talking on in this way, the old man confessed that he had experienced many ups and downs in his career. He was not born in India, but he had lived in the country since his boyhood. He had turned his hand to more than one occupation in his time, but he believed that after all his line was more in the jungle than anywhere else. He had done a little painting off and on, and he, was a bit of a naturalist, but if he were asked, say, by a census taker, what his occupation was, he would be inclined to answer: "*shikari*."

Bradshaw at this point having asked "what's a *shikari*?" he replied:

"A sportsman—a man who goes after game of all sorts from a snipe to a tiger. And believe me it isn't every man who is fit to be a *shikari*. It strikes me you have to be born for the business, and its tricks are not to be learnt in a day. Anyhow I know that in the first place the *pukka shikari* must be keen of eye and ear and be a tough strong man. You must be patient, you must be a pretty good shot, and you must know all about guns, and gear, and camp craft. And the more you know about the jungle, and about the ways and habits of every beast, bird and reptile in it, the better. Oh, a man can hardly ever say that he knows the

jungle. Many men know a great deal about it, but few know all about its curiosities and secrets."

Bradshaw here having mentioned snakes again, the planter said something about the king cobra.

"Ah, the king cobra!" repeated the old man. "I shall never forget the first time I came across one, and although I had already a good experience of the jungle then, I'll admit now that the first sight of the reptile as it reared up and spread its ghastly hood, appalled me. That experience indeed is well marked in my memory. It happened on the afternoon of a fine day late in the month of October when I was stalking through a thick belt of forest on the sub-Himalayan border of the United Provinces."

The planter having related the story of a man's thrilling encounter with a king cobra in a wild part of northern Bengal, the *shikari's* comment on the adventure was: "quite possible, quite possible," and adding that reptiles, beasts and birds were apt to do strange things under stress. In the trail of game, he said, odd things now and then occurred, and a man who had jungle life under his eye from year to year was sometimes led into curious adventures.

"Just to show you how things may happen," he said, "I may tell you now of one experience I had myself a great many years ago, and it was like this: After a week or two during which I had a great run of *shikar* luck, I continued to follow my nose, as the saying is, for miles and miles till at last I found myself in a tract of very wild and lonesome jungle. It was in that part of Central India where the Nerbudda river rises, and various signs told me that I was now in territory that had seldom heard a gun report, and I supposed that a European must be a rare sight in these parts.

"I had with me a servant and a native *shikari*. I was living the life of the jungle camp. The fare was rough, but I was keeping in prime health, and as you might well expect, I had the appetite of a hunter. The supply of grub that I had brought with me when I first set out for the jungle, was soon consumed, and then my meat was the game that fell to my gun, my bread was the stone-baked chupattee, and my liquor was toddy, which, you know, is the juice drawn from the trunk of a kind of palm tree—"

Here the story was suddenly broken off. A servant approached the narrator and whispered a message in his ear. Somebody downstairs wanted to see him. The old man arose, apologised, and left us.

A moment later, the planter, turning towards us with a knowing smile, remarked that the old man told a story as



if he were reading it from a book. But in the telling he was longwinded, and he brought so many details into the narration that for want of time he often had to leave a story unfinished. Just now, the planter added, we had heard the beginning of a promising *shikar* yarn, but he doubted whether we should hear the end of it.

The planter's doubt was right. When the old man came back his expression had entirely changed. He wore another face now, and it appeared as if all thought of *shikar* life and adventure had passed out of his mind. The care of the moment, whatever it may have been, held his tongue, and not another word did we hear of that story he had begun with such promise of entertainment.

Not long after the old man had come upstairs and rejoined us, we were reminded of the flight of time by the chiming of the church tower clock over the way, and at that moment the elder seaman who, with his mate, was sitting near us, took the pipe from his mouth, and looking towards the church in a reverent manner, uttered a pious phrase in Latin.

Such an expression from a man of this type surprised me, and I turned curiously towards the speaker, who smiled, and observed that, no doubt, it was strange to hear Latin words from the lips of an old "deep sea sailor."

The man had remarkably frank eyes that twinkled with friendliness, and his smile was singularly engaging and genial. His features were regular, and I fancied that in shape his head was like that of a noted leader in the American Civil War. He looked almost twice as old as his Norwegian shipmate whom he addressed as "Hans," but though so greatly different in age and in other respects, they were akin at least in one feature. Both had twinkling blue eyes.

In his talk to me the seaman related the main facts of his career. He told me that his Celtic surname meant "son of the sea," that he came from Ireland, that he was the son of a fisherman, and was born on the coast of Clare amid the storms and mists of the Atlantic. There, in a bleak, sea-exposed parish, as the padre could not always depend on one and the same clerk to serve him regularly at mass, he taught the method of service to several of the fishermen's sons and drilled them in the Latin responses. It was one of these responses that had been repeated just now by the seaman on hearing the chiming of the church clock.

With the strong air of the Atlantic in his nostrils since birth, the boy grew up with a notion of going to sea, and one day having worked his way down the coast to Cork, and discovering by chance on landing there that a hand was

wanted on an American cattle boat bound for Boston, he shipped for that port, and since then the sea had been his calling.

The man declared that he and his shipmate, Hans, were seafarers of the old type—that is, men of sail and not of steam. They belonged to the crew of a full-rigged schooner that had just arrived in the port of Calcutta. And a rare sight now that schooner was, one of those few tramp relics of sail that still roamed the seas, picking up cargo wheresoever it offered. The vessel was indeed a curiosity among the shipping of the port, for as all might see it was the only windjammer on the Hooghly.

Thus did talk in this chance company bring us to midnight, and when then we heard the clock strike again on that church tower, our minds snuggled in the thought that we could remain yet another hour on this terrace, for the T.B. did not close till 1 a.m. And now when the tongues of landsman and seaman were delivering entertainment from great stores of experience, and when we were in the flush of enjoyment, we might well have wished that time would lag. But that last hour did not lag, but sped as it seemed. It surprised us by its brevity, and we felt as if we had been cheated by the clock when the proprietor appeared, and with a smile uttered one courteous word that proclaimed the closure.

At once responding to that polite announcement, we arose, eight in all, and filed down the narrow staircase to the street. There, with exchanges of hearty "good nights," the party dispersed. Each couple went its way, and at that moment perhaps no one gave a thought to the probability that never again would those eight souls pass an evening together on that same terrace, nor maybe ever meet again.

As we two paused on the footpath for a moment, Bradshaw suggested to me, that as it was Thursday (the military holiday in India), we might, before returning to quarters, stroll round for a while to see how Calcutta, or a part of that city, looked about this strange time when the small hours had set in.

To this proposal I said "yes," and away we started on that night ramble of which my memories make the substance of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CITY IN STILL HOURS

THE part of Calcutta that Bradshaw and I decided to stroll through after the clocks of the city had struck one, was a district that stretched away southwards of the street in which the "T.B." was situated. Along that street, which was the northern boundary of the locality, we strode away for some distance, and then turned off the direct highway. Thence onward for a great part of the way we trod strange ground, and a sense of direction was our guide. Instinct gave us the route somehow, and we guessed at turnings.

As we went along everything we saw reminded us of the advance of the night. Silence and peace had extended over the city. The tramcars had ceased to run, and the streets were almost deserted. Only here and there was a person to be seen afoot, and one of the few we met on the way was a ship's apprentice who accosted us.

This young man too had had a drink or two during the evening, and his speech was frank. He told us his story in brief. His ship was on the Hooghly and was moored at that part of the river called Garden Reach. He had been in port a fortnight, and in that time he had seen enough of India. He did not like the country. He was glad he was a European. He would rather be a well-paid artizan with some provision for the future in a snug cottage in England than a chief or a prince in India.

Having parted with the "shippy," we traversed streets and lanes littered with garbage that would not be touched by the scavenger until the hour when the crows begin to caw. And we noticed as we went along some odd lonesome-looking houses that stood far back from the street, a circumstance which was a token of their antiquity. These urban bungalows belonged to old Calcutta, or to a Calcutta which was dim in the memories of the oldest people then living. They were houses that had known good times, and maybe

gay times. They had been the abodes of people who could afford to live in good style. But growth of the town, growth of trade, and the traffic and noise had caused that class to move from this neighbourhood. And the migration was to southward, a direction in which the city had been growing since the days of Warren Hastings.

But though cheapened by time and change, and having now on either side the jerrybuilder's ramshackle structures that abutted on the footpath, and flaunted divers signs and tokens of business on a dingy street front, those old houses still had an air of decency. Standing well back from the highway, each looked snug in the seclusion of a little walled-in garden area, or "compound," where flowering shrubs and creeper yielded gay adornment, where one or two cocoa-nut trees, or mango trees grew, and birds came to chirp and warble in sunny hours.

Our way lay by the city's central bazar that is called the New Market. This is one of the big sights of Calcutta. No other city in the East can show a place of such extent and variety. It is a market of markets, and it is visited by all the world and his wife, for there can be bought almost everything from a needle to an anchor.

At certain hours this "universal bazar" was crowded with shoppers, and the business of its divers stalls gave forth a great echoing murmur, but now the place was empty and silent. Its gates were locked, and only in one part could a glimpse be obtained of the interior from the approaches. This was the section on the east side occupied by the meat market. That market the passer-by could view through a steel railing.

This place was dimly lighted, and as we gazed into it, the sight of an extended hose line and wetness in parts reminded us that the area had been copiously swilled. But little did that swilling, thorough though it may have been, serve to abate the odours. The smells of an abattoir prevailed.

Not a soul was now to be seen within this area secured by the steel railing and locked gates. All was stark vacancy and stillness. But after another couple of hours the carts would be coming in with their loads of beef and mutton, and soon after dawn this section of the New Market would resound with the clamour of the purchasers at the stalls where the Moslem butchers would be busy dismembering, chopping, weighing and selling. And at such a scene of big trade in butcher's meat, the visitor from other lands might wonder. He might not expect to find such a market in the heart of a city that is three parts Hindu and therefore three parts vegetarian. But great is the multitude of the eaters

of beef and mutton, for Calcutta after all is a great Moslem city. Indeed by count of souls it is the greatest Moslem city in India.

As we advanced farther and farther into that quarter of Calcutta that lies eastward of this chief market, all sights reminded us of the lateness of the hour, and the depth of the city's repose. And we saw that not all the city's million slept under roofs or on soft beds. Many of those who toiled during the heat of the day and who subsisted on the lightest means on which tropical man may subsist, slept clear of dwelling-houses. The streets were their dormitories. There slumbering forms could be seen on every side. Wheresoever a man found a level vacant spot within hail of a neighbour, there he rested his four bones. Many had stretched themselves on the open footpath; some lay on doorsteps, and some even on the ledges of padlocked shops. Some had pillows of sorts, but a great many heads rested on the bare pavement, and most of the sleepers wore no more than a loin cloth. And thus slept a multitude of the populace this sultry April night in all those streets and rambling lanes that stretched for miles along the banks of the Hooghly.

Few at this drowsy hour could be wideawake, and from observation we had reason to believe that not even the eyes of those who were guardians of the city's peace were all open. For instance, we saw at one place a Hindu policeman on duty, and he was not patrolling, nor vigilant, nor wide-awake. With his arms folded and his chin on his chest he was leaning up against a gate-post, and he was fast asleep.

But if man slept some other forms of life were wakeful and active. Rats were to be seen. Here and there we noticed them scurrying along the bases of dead walls or venturing across the roadway. One we saw questioning among refuse that had been spilled on the footpath from an upset bin. Here also a wretched pye-dog, seeing something going, had languidly approached and got his snout to the rubbish. The rat was fat and bloated. The pye-dog was weak, mangy, and starved to the bone. The rat discovered a tiny edible and nibbled at it daintily. The pye-dog after nosing for a little while wolfed up a morsel of something, and, showing the whites of its eyes, bore it away with a cowering greedy look in the manner of a cur that had secured a meaty bone from a rich kitchen.

And for whatsoever they found here, the dog and the rat might thank the bull that roamed the streets, and, in quest of something to eat, had poked its head into the mouth of a rubbish bin, and, boring to its depth, upset the bin and let spill its contents on the kerbside. That "brahminy bull,"

that upsetter of bins, was the beast that enjoyed the freedom of the city. Obstruct or damage as it may, never will it be driven to a pound. It goes where it will unmolested. The constable that wears the sacred thread may scold it out of the way, but beat it he will not, for this roamer of the streets, this beefy ox that shall not be sold to a butcher, is sacred to the Hindus. Two-thirds of the city's people bless it.

Having passed by the spilled rubbish, the tumbled bin, and the worshipped ox that not far away, lay on the footpath chewing the kud, we came into a neighbourhood where roads bore the names of forgotten Europeans, Moslems and Hindus. Here no fine streets or buildings, or decent shops were to be seen. Indeed from the side from which we now approached it, this quarter seemed to be only a mean and squalid bazar. But the whole district was not alike. It varied much in aspect and condition. In some parts the lanes led through slums of *busti* huts roofed with bamboo and rude tiles. In other parts the lanes were wider, and fronting them were little *pukkha*-built cottages, or squat petty bungalows, each standing in the seclusion of a small enclosure, or compound, and having a wide wooden gate opening into the road. Here and there too tropical vegetation beautified and sweetened surroundings, and took the eye away from unsightly objects. Luxuriant creeper embowered little porches, climbed over walls, and twined round gate posts; and it appeared as if every little bit of garden, by whomsoever owned, had a flowering tree, or flowering shrub, scenting the languid air this still, sultry night.

This neighbourhood was unlike any other part of Calcutta. Though not closely built throughout, it was crowded in some places, and it had greater diversity of population than any other quarter of the city. The miscellany of people included not only communities of Indian and other Asiatic races, but also numbers of Europeans, and many of that class now known as Anglo-Indians. Asia and Europe approached and met here at points, but the two worlds easily contrived to live apart, each going its own way and abiding by its own faith and caste.

Here a decent resident, minding his own business, might reason to himself and declare that the way in which somebody in the next lane, or even in the same lane, lived, was a matter of indifference to him. But the career and mode of life of that neighbour somebody might not be a matter of indifference to the police or to the excise department. And to that remark it may be added that, nooks and corners of this part of the city were known to be the abodes of some persons who lived curious lives, some persons whose past was shady

and whose present was doubtful, and many who, though the law kept its hands off them, were still "on the register."

Strolling onward through a part of this area, we came into one of those lanes which, as my pal remarked, were usually quieter by day than by night. These lanes were the resort of the White Man. They were notorious at one time. European seaman, soldier, and civilian had each his own slang name for this quarter, which used to be the scene of many a "rag" by carousers after hours.

The particular lane which we had now entered might aptly be called "European Lane," from its residents and from its frequenters. The place was all of a sort. Its little pukkhah-built houses, or petty bungalows, were of similar design and size, and each was adorned by the same species of tropical shrub and flowering creeper. The occupants of the houses were all women, and all were foreigners. All came from Europe or the fringes of Europe.

In this lane there were no shops, but in one place was a little hole-in-the-wall stall kept by a man who not only sold matches and cigarettes, but also soda-water. This man was not like other dealers who sold the same things at hole-in-the-wall stalls elsewhere. In manner, smartness, and skill at his little trade marked a sharp difference. He had been sharpened, and the whetstone was experience. So it seemed to Bradshaw and to me when now we roused the man to serve us with soda-water. The promptness with which he rose to our demand, his glibness and slang, and his deftness in handling keys, money and bottles, were signs that his wits had been polished by contact with his customers, and that those customers were mostly the residents of this lane.

This hole-in-the-wall trader was well aware that those customers, the foreign *mem-log* and their visitors, did not always drink the soda-water neat. He knew too that although by law the licensed shops closed at nine o'clock, liquor could still be procured at all hours during the night. That, however, was another business, and being illicit, was ever under the shadow of danger. Great indeed was risk in that commerce. But, even so, demand found the man to drive the trade, and many years later I heard a story of one, who, from little venturesome beginnings, in time bourished in this traffic. his secret store held a big stock, but the opening through which the liquor was handed out was little larger in diameter than the stoutest bottle in the trade. However, through this little aperture the business went on from year to year, and the owner, having bribed those who knew his secret, and who were powerful, made large profits and became wealthy.

At this late hour of this mid-week night, there were few persons about. It was not like a Saturday night, or a night before a public holiday. All was dull and quiet here now, but as we passed by one of the houses, one of the little snug bungalows, we saw two women and a man sitting at a table in the enclosed space, or small compound, in front of the building. This little area, in the centre of which the table was set, was adorned by two flourishing shrubs, one bearing scarlet, and the other purple flowers. The gateway opening into the lane from the compound was spanned by a rich growth of sweet-smelling creeper, and flower and leaf looked pretty in the light cast by an adjacent street lamp.

On the table at which the three persons sat, was a tray containing bottles and glasses, and at first sight it appeared as if the women were hostesses to the man. But at whose cost that liquor had been obtained was a question that might be left to the guess of anybody who knew the world.

The beer which, as a bottle label showed, was the product of a Munich brewery, had animated talk. At the moment that talk was about somebody who had made a fortune, and we sauntered past so slowly, and the air was so still, that we clearly heard one of the women declare in a strong foreign accent, that if the sum of money mentioned had come to her, she would pack at once for Europe and "get right away from this black man's country."

When we reached the end of the lane, where there was but a dead wall on either side, and where a street lamp gave poor light, we paused for a moment, and listening, heard but the croaking of frogs and the hum of insects. Bradshaw yawned, and suggested that perhaps we had gone far enough, and that as it was now so late, we might make a bee's line for barracks. I agreed, and, briskening our pace, we headed for Fort William.

On the way we could see that even at this hour some persons were already afoot to earn their day's bread. Early workers were moving towards the central part of the city. Coolies with baskets on their heads hurried past. Bullock-carts laden with vegetables, rumbled slowly along with lights swinging from the axles, and showing their destination by plain tokens. Day by day at this same cock-crow hour did those carts thus come rumbling along with lights swinging from the axles, for they were some of the carriers of Calcutta's food supply, and those loads of cabbages, carrots, and radishes had to be on the way long before dawn to be well in time for the New Market, the depot that feeds the city's maw.



Those carters, who looked as if they had come a considerable way, had brought along with them some of their little ones. On one of the carts a tiny infant lay fast asleep on top of the vegetables. It reposed on its back with its hands resting loosely on its breast, and its face directed towards the heavens, as if, rocked by the cart, it had fallen asleep while gazing at the stars and wondering at the immensity of space.

At length we got clear of the close area of houses, streets and lanes, and arrived on the fringe of the great open expanse of green park that lay between the city and the river Hooghly. We had reached the Maidan, and Fort William lay ahead in the distance. On a sure bearing, we now went onward at a quicker pace across this grassy tract till we came to a spot where in the faint light we perceived a dark object lying on the ground. The object was a man, and as we came close to the prostrate form we saw that the man was a European, and that the European was a British sailor.

"Hello, what's here!—bit of blue dungarees and summat else! exclaimed Bradshaw with a whispering Yorkshire giggle, as he stooped and peered down upon the limp, huddled form of the "salt" that lay still as a corpse.

Here was no mystery. Circumstances told a plain story, which might be summed up thus: ship in port—sailor ashore—the grogshop—pungent beer, or "fix bayonets whisky"—empty pockets. Man blindly attempts to return to ship, but being groggy, fails to make headway, and runs aground in the darkness of the Maidan.

"Well, it's no place for a white man to lie for the night, but I can't see as how we can help Jack," said Bradshaw. "Let him bide," he added. "He'll sleep off the booze and wake up when the sun gets on his eyes. There's nowt amiss, and anyhow you know a sailor has as many lives as a cat."

Leaving the seaman to sleep away his grogshop surfeit, we went ahead, and at length gained the sortie we had been making for. Crossing the bridged passage over the moat, we were challenged by the sentry who stood beneath the arch of Plassey Gate. But the challenge was uttered in a low tone, as if the sentry were reluctant to break the peace of the night.

Within the ramparts all was solemn quiet. The lateness of the hour, the stillness of the air, and sleep, had hushed Fort William. Not a soul was about. Our quiet approach to the back entrance of the big barrack there was none to espy, and when we had ascended the wide wooden stairway and gained the landing, nobody probably heard our light tread on the stone-flagged floor of the vast dimly-lighted dormi-

tory where three hundred sleeping men were fanned by the alternating swing of the electric punkhas.

We sought and found our cots without disturbing a sleeper, had a final whispered chat as we undressed and lay down with no concern for a morrow's duty on our minds. Three taps on the main guard gong had told us that we were but three hours from reveille. But that did not matter. There would be no parade for us this morning ; and if at the time when sparrows begin to chirp, a bugle-call should wake us, we could turn over to sleep on with the sweet thought that it was Thursday and a holiday.

## CHAPTER IX

### ON THE VERGE OF THE JUNGLE

IN Fort William regimental life and duty went on from day to day and week to week with little alteration from March to October. But the turn of the season in the latter month brought about various little changes and more activity.

The hot weather was now over and the rains were past. Those swinging electric punkhas that for seven months had been fanning the dormitories of the large barracks were stopped, for now it was deemed that the "cold weather" had set in. Day by day now the sun shone from clear skies. The trees retained their foliage, but they were not now looking fresh and green as in the days when they used to be cleansed by monsoon showers. They were now covered with dust; and every area that had been a green expanse, was green no longer, but looked parched and brown.

The trooping season had now arrived. Regiments received drafts from the United Kingdom, and the same ships that brought the "drafties" out to India, took back parties of time-expired troops for discharge in England. And now too the training season had begun, and commands seemed to be making up, as it were, for the long spell of slackness during the hot weather. Companies of our own regiment were sent to Barrackpore for musketry, and they went thither not by road or by rail, but were transported by river launches—a pleasant trip of seventeen miles up the Hooghly.

After our own company had completed its musketry, Bradshaw and I, and a number of other men, were left behind at Barrackpore to serve as markers in the butts for another company, and also for a large party of "casuals" that later came up from Calcutta. Thus, by chance, there came to us a long spell of duty which was to our liking, for it gave us great freedom during the remainder of our time on this detachment. We had but one parade for the one job before us every day, and firing was finished early in the afternoon.

From then until next morning we were free. And it was fatigue dress all the time.

Among our party no man enjoyed this change more than Bradshaw. He delighted in the liberties which it gave him far away from the hearing of the bugle-calls at headquarters. To him "markers" on detachment in this tract near the Hooghly, was not a fatigue, but vacation and recreation. To parade every morning in shirt sleeves, and khaki trousers, to march down to the rifle range to signal scores and patch bullet punctures for a few hours, to return to barracks with a thirst for a pot of beer in that canteen under the shady trees, to doze in the afternoon, or to read his *Nat Gould*, or that *Yorkshire paper* chockful of sporting news—this unvarying round from day to day suited Bradshaw very well.

Thursday was not for us a holiday at Barrackpore, but Sunday was a day of great freedom, when a man might roam anywhere from sunrise to sunset. And Bradshaw was one of those who made the most of this freedom, and with a great eagerness for exploration he would ramble far away and into the jungle to see what might be seen of things that were wild and strange.

The big game sought by the *shikari* might not be spotted in the jungle fringes of this territory. But in former days, and certainly in the days when William Carey, the missionary, wrote that three-fifths of Bengal was "uncultivated jungle abandoned to wild beasts and serpents," Barrackpore must have known the tiger to its cost. But when at a later period civilization made beaten paths in backward districts, and when at the same time the quest of the big game stalker became keener, "stripes" became rare in this neighbourhood, and the hunter had to seek him in wilder and remoter territory.

But if the tiger had forsaken this district, other carnivora of the jungle had not become scarcer. The lesser and meaner species remained. The carrion-feeders abounded. The jackal was there, and his kind had probably become not less, but more numerous than they had been in the past. The cantonment was indeed infested by these animals. They prowled among the grounds in the vicinity of the barracks, and at dusk every evening set up a great howling.

As we could observe, carrion at Barrackpore was soon scented and despatched by jackal, vulture and dog. These were the scavengers of the field and jungle, just as at one time the adjutant birds were the scavengers of the streets of Calcutta—a fact which is commemorated by symbol on the arms of that city. And we had good reason to believe that the flesh that fell to these consumers was not always the

flesh of ox, goat, or other animal. Now and again perhaps, on the outskirts of this civil and military station, a human body, abandoned and unknown, might be discovered, and devoured by jackals and other bone-pickers of the jungle. In fact such a thing once happened here before our eyes.

After a ramble away from barracks one Sunday, some men from our detachment came back with a story that at a lone-some spot near the jungle, they had come across the body of an Indian that had been partly devoured by jackals. The ramblers' account of their gruesome discovery aroused the curiosity of other men in the barrack-room, and later in the day a party set out for the spot, and they came back with confirmation of the story. They found that the body had been reduced to a skeleton, the flesh having been further consumed by jackals and vultures since the first party had seen it.

A human body abandoned to jackal and vulture at a place only seventeen miles away from the capital of the country—not a word of that, to my knowledge ever appeared in a public print or in any other record. The matter dwelt in my mind for some time, and in the cantonment bazar I told the story one day to a Bengali stallkeeper. The man listened with keen attention to the facts as I related them. It was news to him. He had not known or heard of such a thing. Yet he expressed no great surprise. He regarded the matter with the calm reflection of a philosopher, and merely remarked that such was the fate of some miserable creatures, and the life of one poor wretch was cheap in a land of swarming millions.

The barracks which we occupied at Barackpore were fairly good buildings, as barrack buildings go. The quarters might be made bright and comfortable with a little care, and at a little cost; but neither care nor cost was expended upon them. There were no electric lights, and only dim illumination was provided by smoky oil lamps. Here, in the hot weather, at certain hours, the barrack-rooms were fanned by *punkhas* that were pulled by coolies. At a late hour in the night, the *punkha*-pullers, wearying at length of this labour, often fell asleep. Air circulation then suddenly stopping, up went the temperature, the mosquito hummed and sought the skin of the white man. And the white man, awakened by the excessive sultriness, and stung by the mosquito, would thereupon pick up a boot, and with a curse, fling it at the sleeping coolie. But now the *punkha*-puller's season was past. The *punkhas* had been dismantled and taken away, for the fifteenth of October had gone by. Now it was assumed that there was no need for fans. The "cold weather" had come.

In these barracks we stayed for several weeks, during which the weather was very fine. Then the company and the "casuals," for which we had been marking, having completed their musketry, the whole detachment packed, and on an afternoon in January marched down to the side of the Hooghly. There we boarded a launch that took us down the broad turbid river to a landing stage in Calcutta, where we disembarked and marched into Fort William.

In Calcutta we found that much change and stir had come about during our absence. The garrison had become livelier. The troops wore "reds" for guards, and for full-dress parades. Duties were performed with greater strictness and with more style, for the commander-in-chief was again in Fort William. The Central Government had reassembled in Calcutta, the Viceroy had returned, and the city had resumed its role as the capital of India.

Having thus become once more the "imperial hub," Calcutta attracted persons of power and position from places far and wide. Chiefs of various States, great and little, came to see the Viceroy. But what might have been the ultimate motive of one or other of these visits, only someone in the Foreign and Political Department might truly know. Yet even some outsiders, even those who had become judges of Indian character by merely studying the ways of their servants—they, holding by the old saying, "know the ryot, know the rajah," might, in such circumstances make pretty close guesses at the truth. But anyhow the Viceroy might be trusted for the wise conduct of these affairs. He was experienced in governor-generalship. He was not the man to be outreached by oriental diplomacy. He would surely handle the business of these State interviews with the gentleness of the dove but with the wisdom of the serpent.

As the supreme Government was now functioning with full pomp in Calcutta, the social season was in full swing. Once again this winter capital had before it a programme of various events designed to honour, to entertain, and to amuse. The Viceroy, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, and other notables, had many calls upon their time, and were busy with the fulfilment of engagements. There were levees, and State balls; there were State drives, reviews, races, and fetes; there were notable weddings; Indian chiefs gave great garden parties, and wealthy citizens entertained with unstinted hospitality.

One consequence of this busy season at the capital was that many demands came to our regiment for the performance of one duty or another—demands that might vary, say, from a call for a subaltern to serve as an extra aide-de-camp, to a call that brought forth a resplendent guard of honour with

colours, band and drums. And how different all this was from the experiences of our last station where fatigues and working parties were so frequent! There we were commended for work that we once did when we navvied with picks and shovels and wheel-barrows, and when our dress was shirt sleeves and slouch hats of Boer pattern. Here our regiment won plaudits for its part in ceremonies and entertainments, for the fine music furnished by its band, and for its smart displays in the gay colour and glitter of full dress.

Within Fort William itself, this season was marked by an event that one day for an hour broke the monotony of humdrum barrack life and gave fresh occupation to the mind. On that day the commander-in-chief decided to carry out a duty which he seldom undertook, or had time to undertake. That duty concerned our regiment alone, and the manner and circumstances in which it was performed are described in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER X

### KITCHENER IN THE BARRACK-ROOM

It was on a mild February morning that our company orderly sergeant made known to us that our barrack-room for once was to be inspected not by the subaltern, nor by the captain, but by the head of the army in India. In other words, the sergeant, who had come post haste from the orderly room, announced aloud, as he strode down the dormitory gangway, that Lord Kitchener was "coming round the barracks."

Our regiment had then been a year in Fort William, and for a part of two seasons the commander-in-chief had been, as it were, our neighbour. He lived over on the ramparts beyond the parade ground during the winter months. His home was but a little way down the road from the large barrack that contained the bulk of our regiment. Many of us who had done sentry-go near his residence had watched him arrive or depart in his stately coach, and with the guard, had given him the "present." Many of us had observed him on dewy mornings down on the moat, or sauntering along the grassy slopes outside the Fort, and some of us had seen him at other times in other places.

Few of the rank and file, however, had yet had an opportunity of seeing the chief as closely as he could be seen when he carried out an inspection. Such an opportunity we were now to have, and I believe we were all pleased. Every one of us probably was curious to see within arm's reach a man whose name was great, and who was the subject of so much writing and gossip. And, besides, we all had some desire to see a little more of the commander whose schemes or decisions might in days to come make eventful military history for his country.

At that time Kitchener was high in the confidence of the army. In the belief of Tommy, and in the belief of every Tommy's colonel in India, "K" could hardly do wrong. To



all of us his policy and his counsel were law. When the hour came we would trust him for the master move on the chess-board of great strategy, and we hardly imagined that his decisions could be rightly over-ruled. His authority was dominant, and criticism could not prevail against it.

Now for the visit of the commander-in-chief of course the barrack must be in a presentable state. Everything must needs be in apple-pie order. The petty negligence overlooked at other times could not be overlooked now. But though the occasion was important, no man could fail to note that discipline was singularly mild that morning. Tones and looks changed. Authority became subdued, and for the moment it appeared as if rank were of little account. Everybody spoke and acted in a spirit of subordination. All grades below Lord Kitchener shrunk to insignificance. The Brobdignagians of other times were now but Lilliputians.

Of course there was a great deal of preparatory bustle. But to the men of our company orders were unnecessary. Well did they know what the occasion demanded, and well did they respond. Everything was made to look its best. Mattresses were never more neatly rolled, nor blankets and bed sheets more neatly folded. On the wooden shelf where dust collected so soon, well was the duster applied. The equipment on the pegs was given a light polish and then hung according to the regimental style, and the rifle was fit for inspection. Beneath the cot the spare pair of boots, the inverted washing bowl, and the plate and mug that had come, not from Staffordshire, but from Austria—all were spick and span. Likewise were the verandahs, tables and benches. And thus many hands having accomplished a cleaning-up and a smartening-up in no time, it appeared from the final glance of our captain that we had made things "all Sir Garnet." And so the company, now in "clean fatigue dress," awaited the announcement of the visitor.

As the moment drew nearer, the men spoke almost in whispers, and were continually glancing away towards the head of the dormitory where the commander-in-chief would first come into view. Curiosity and expectancy held us in tension, and the time passed so slowly that seconds seemed minutes.

At length murmurs ceased. There was a little commotion near the head of the stairs. Had the commander-in-chief been sighted and word passed along? Looks answered the question. Lord Kitchener was indeed approaching. He had already passed under that low massive archway down below, and was now ascending the resounding wooden stairs that

led to this big barrack's first floor of arcaded dormitories. The resounding footsteps warned listening ears. There was a shuffle. Men stood to their cots. The company was hushed. "Attention—Commander-in-Chief!" was the solemn announcement, and lo, in an instant, the renowned "K. of K." was in our barrack-room!

Now of course if Lord Kitchener had wished he could have carried out this inspection accompanied only by one or two officers. But as he had given no intimation of such a wish, he was numerously attended. Indeed the imposing staff that followed at his heels surprised the barrack. It represented the regiment, the brigade, the division, and headquarters—it represented the Army in India. And so it might be deemed a great occasion for our company and for the regiment, and it might be fancied that for the moment the Gosling Greens had become the most important unit in a military command that extended from Persia to the Chinese frontiers. And amid this great array of staff we were pleased to see our own commanding officer, a lieutenant-colonel, in the position of right hand man to the commander-in-chief—a role that he had assumed with fine address and dignity.

Had this inspection been as deliberate as a subaltern's on a morning round, we would have been enabled to study our visitor more closely. But the chief's inspection was not at all in the manner of the cane-twirling junior officer. He scarcely glanced towards the head of a cot. He seemed to have no concern for details, and as he went along his observation was more ahead than to one side or the other. He took but a sweeping glance at things, and to those who knew most about him then, this could have been a matter of little wonder. Was it likely that Lord Kitchener would be attentive to the arrangement of a barrack cot at the very period when he was said to be getting tired of the Army, was thinking of some great civil billet, and was even aspiring for the highest post in India under the Crown?

But though his observation of our cots may have been scant, our observation of the chief himself was not so. The eyes of everyone who stood on either side of that central gangway keenly read the face of that famed man who passed by within a distance of four feet. And that brief gaze of a second or two told us more than all that we had ever heard or read about "K. of K."

Lord Kitchener that day seemed to be in enjoyment of fullest health, and he had the robust looks of one who lives much and actively in the open air. He showed the bronzing of the man acclimatized by long service in Africa and Asia. Anyone could see at once that he had been well "baked" in

the tropics, and that his skin had been for long periods exposed to desert air and scorching suns. From his face you got the impression that he was a man who dined not lightly, but rather generously, and you would not suppose that he would prefer a mild wine to a brandy and soda. And further, you might guess from his looks that he habitually dined without the bother of affairs, and that he would not sometimes in the manner of Napoleon, abruptly end his meal, quit the table and walk away munching, but that he would sit out the courses to the very end.

The front view of a Kitchener in full dress was greatly different from the profile view of a Kitchener in the sombre khaki uniform he wore that morning. In that dress he did not at all appear as he looked in the stately portrait that adorned the window of a Calcutta photographer. The chin, the feature of which so much had been said about its indicative firmness and determination—that did not seem remarkable to a side view. And the nose showed no greatness. Little did it resemble the nose of a Caesar, a Napoleon, a Wellington, or a Washington. Indeed if you referred to the portraits of these famous men for comparison, you might consider that the Kitchener nose was of an inferior type.

These were the impressions snatched from that one brief stare at the countenance of a man who passed me almost within arm's reach. A few seconds more would have enabled me to take fuller mental notes, but that man of fame passed on, and in the course of his progress along the passage he paused but once. This pause occurred about half way down the dormitory. There the procession was brought to a halt. The chief, suddenly checking his pace, turned sharply, and strode through the doorway to the verandah, glanced up and down at the row of trestle tables and benches, then re-entered the dormitory, and continued his tour to the end of the building. There, filing on behind its leader, the staff retinue trailed round the pier of the last arch, and passed downstairs, and when it had reached ground level, somebody shouted "Fall out!"

The commander-in-chief's inspection was over. After all it was little more than a tour from end to end of the building through that long dormitory occupied by our company. And my recollection is that Lord Kitchener while within the barrack never addressed a remark to anyone in the ranks. All the men standing beside their cots on either side of that central passage he passed by as if they were so many wooden posts.

What would Napoleon have said of a marshal who had passed through a barrack-room over a hundred yards long without speaking a word to a man standing beside his cot?

And how would Napoleon himself have acted if he had been carrying out a similar inspection with a great staff at his heels? It is easy to imagine what his attitude to the ranks would have been. He would have questioned and chatted with several of the men. He would probably have inquired about their services, their rations, their beer, and their pastimes. He would perhaps want to know what they kept in this or that receptacle, how much such an article cost in the bazar, how they polished their equipment, and if their boots were comfortable.

To address inquiries like these to anyone in the ranks was probably beyond the thought of our generalissimo. He was not a "Tommy's man." His were not the ways of a Roberts, an Evelyn Wood, or a Smith-Dorrien. And this circumstance considered, it might well have been wondered whether if he were to be put in actual command of great forces in the field, he would hold the devotion of the troops throughout a long and trying campaign.

Some time after that "fall out!" had been shouted, when the barrack had resumed its buz, I happened to walk on to the verandah, and glancing over the railings, I again beheld Lord Kitchener, who had now concluded his tour downstairs. He was in fact at that very instant returning the salute of our commanding officer—and it was a free and full salute that the field-marshal did return the lieutenant-colonel. But he seemed to me a different Kitchener now. At the moment the dignity of the commander-in-chiefship had relaxed. Released from the tension of ceremony, his manner had changed, his expression had mellowed, and his demeanour was not unlike that of a private returning to quarters after duty, and animated by the assurance that he was "finished for the day." Now it was Kitchener off-parade, and for the moment he belied all the pictures of the illustrated press.

After returning that salute from our commanding officer, he strode away for a few paces in the direction of the Queen's Bastion. Then, with a sudden change of countenance, and with a boyish gesture, he took out a cigarette, and while stooping to light it, almost brushed against the shoulder of the member of his staff who was with him. Then instantly perceiving as he threw the match away, that there was no need to walk for a distance of a hundred yards to the point where the road turned, he decided to take a short-cut across the parade ground.

In thus making a bee's line to his home on the ramparts, he had to pass through the row of trees that extended along the border between the road and the parade ground. Consequently, after he had turned off the road and passed beneath

the trees, I who was on the verandah, which was on a higher level, could see him only for a moment, as the screen of leafy branches cut off the view. But in that one brief moment I noticed that the interval between field-marshal and captain suddenly narrowed. Lord Kitchener drew close to the other officer with a quick light movement of the head and shoulders, and both apparently entered into frank and familiar converse.

Anyone who was watching them at this moment might suppose that the officer who was at the army commander's shoulder was the keeper of his chief's confidence. And this was a little matter well worth noting, because, as many people well knew, Lord Kitchener was not free with his friendships. The belief was that he was a solitary-minded mysterious man, and that though a good number of persons may have been well acquainted with him at one time or another, of very few could it be said that they had been admitted to the privy chambers of his mind.

On that day we would have had reason to suppose that our chief was pleased with himself, and satisfied with what life had given him. He had attained the summit of his military career. His reputation was at its height. His fame shone. His policy had triumphed. He had been given his way, and after a dispute with a powerful opponent, the verdict of authority had been cast in his favour. His prestige was great, his renown commanded the homage of the highest and humblest, and wherever he went, people bustled to show him honour.

And all was serene that day. In the sky of the "international situation" there was not a speck of a cloud, and destiny whispered not a hint of the coming of that great war that was to test men, sap reputations, break careers, and send Lord Kitchener to shipwreck and doom in the North Sea.

## CHAPTER XI

### FROM BENGAL TO THE LAND WHERE WE SAW THE WHITE PEAKS OF THE HINDU KUSH

THE remaining period of the regiment's stay in Calcutta brought no great changes. From February to October the course of routine did not differ greatly from what it had been throughout the same months in the previous year. A strong sun and high temperatures made this the slack season. Military as well as civil affairs had to be ordered with due regard to the weather. The climate ruled to a great extent.

March brought the first breath of the hot weather. Once again Lord Kitchener went away to the cool heights of Simla, and once again Fort William ceased to be the headquarters of the army in India. The effect of this change might be guessed. Control remained but the master had gone, and there was a feel of lightened responsibility. Organization worked with a lessened strain. There was now more devolution of authority. Seniors took leave and temporary commands came to lower ranks.

At the same time, through one cause or another, our regiment had shrunk on parade. A detachment was again sent to the hills for the benefit of its health. There were grants of furlough ; men were taken for courses of instruction ; men were put on this or that billet. And so though strong on paper, the battalion made but a poor show on an adjutant's drill.

The sun was already strong in March. In April the heat was intense, and in May it was even hotter. And outside the ramparts the great free expanse of park land that stretched from the Fort to the city had once more become green and refreshing to view. Flowering trees on roadside, garden and compound were objects of admiration, and in many a place the still sultry air carried the fragrance of tropical flower and plant.

June brought the monsoon, cyclonic storms, and copious downpours. Then came the damp heats of Bengal, a season which was bad for metals, leather, and men's livers. Steel soon corroded, brass soon tarnished, and leather mildewed overnight. The dampness and mugginess told on everything. And so the dutyman in barracks had to have a greater care for his bayonet, his rifle barrel, for the brass and leather of his equipment, and for the spare pair of boots beneath his cot.

And yet it was in the swelter of this season that Calcutta played football, and played it in a spirit and manner that were the wonder of visitors. Football had become a craze in this city by the Hooghly. Nothing like it prevailed elsewhere. While there was little ardour for the game in other places in India, Calcutta went "football mad" every hot season. Here the Bengali, of all Indian races, the least inclined for great exertion of body, might be seen in a fever of enthusiasm over this strenuous game.

They had here their leagues and tournaments, and principal matches drew the multitude. On an afternoon when the crack Bengali team played a European team all roads led to the appointed ground. Out of the city from places far and near, streamed Bengalis. They swarmed on the Maidan, and long before the kick-off, an emotional excited multitude had massed along the sides of the ground. There, swayed and thrilled by every turn of the game, the heated perspiring throngs watched and cheered throughout that sultry hour. And that cheered Bengali team played not in boots but in bare feet.

As football thus occupied a great deal of the popular mind at this season, the Calcutta press gave much space to the subject. Men of the regiment read reports of the matches with close attention, and the readers were critical. The reporter's version seldom pleased. It was generally believed to be biassed. The reporter had given undue praise to some players, and had withheld praise from others—the others being those who played for the regiment.

The results of games, the conduct of players, the ruling of referees, raised heated debates in the canteen where there were lively scenes on "football nights." Often players fresh from the ground and in muddied and sweat-soaked costumes, went directly to the canteen and there remained till the bar closed. Whether the game played that afternoon had been won or lost, everybody drank. Some drank beyond measure, and voices rose higher and higher till "taps" were struck and put an end to the boisterous babel.

By August, however, the football season had ended, and all that had been said and done concerning the game had passed out of mind. September, slack and muggy September, and fag-end of the rains, was with us again, and so we had come to the end of our second hot season in Fort William.

And now that we had been a year and seven months in this, our first Indian station, what, it may be asked, was the state of the regiment's health? It might be reported as good. But it could not be certified to be as good as it was before the regiment came to the country. The effects of the climate could not be denied. Many men now weighed a little less than they weighed on that day when the regiment marched into Fort William. Every man's blood had changed. Cheeks told a tale. There were hardly any pale men in the regiment when we first arrived, but now there were many. The ruddiest had lost colour.

It was plain that the climate of Bengal was not good for the regiment. It relaxed and enervated. A change of stations would therefore be for our benefit, and that change we knew we would be having in due course. What our next station was to be we had known since December when the annual Moves were published. We were under orders for the North West Frontier. We were for distant Peshawar, and in anticipation of that move we were being enlightened by lectures that were short and simple, but that told us what we needed most to know. From these we learnt much in an easy way about the country of the Afghan and Pathan.

But everyone in the regiment would not be going to the North West Frontier. There were those men whose time with the colours was drawing to an end. They would soon be leaving us. The trooping season was approaching. October was near and the first troopship would soon be in Bombay. So "time-expired," "troopers," and the way things were done at the discharge depot at Gosport were subjects that were talked about again and again. And these were matters of close concern to my friend, Bradshaw, for he too would be among the first party to leave for Bombay, and so we should be parting for good.

A week or two later this parting had come about. The time-expired party had left with mellow farewells and fair promises. The battalion had lost a fraction of its strength, but it was soon to be reinforced from Home. A fresh draft was on the way and would await us at the new station.

Early in November preparations for the move had far advanced. By this time the heavy baggage had already been packed and despatched to Peshawar, and having vacated barracks in Fort William we moved into camp on the Maidan.



There we were near the place from which we were bound to depart for our new station. The military railway siding which was alongside the Hooghly was only a few hundred yards away. There the troop trains would appear on that day when we would be relieved by that regiment that was coming from overseas.

When the last day came, procedure followed plans. Early in the afternoon the troopship bringing the relieving regiment steamed up the Hooghly and entered the docks. The troops disembarked without delay, and headed by the band marched on to our camp.

Our regiment did not move when the new regiment came in. Departure did not take place until some hours later. Indeed night had fallen when the right half of the battalion left the tents and moved out to ground clear of the camp lines. There, after it had waited for some time, it picked up its kits, marched across to the railway siding, and halted alongside the waiting troop train. There, company by company, section by section, and groups and chums together, the half battalion was snugly entrained in a few moments.

The minutes that remained were spent in chats with friends for some time, "ex-men" and others had come down to see us off. And then amid final handshakes and adieux, the loaded troop train moved off to the farewell music by the band. Some time later another troop train moved in and was boarded by the other half of the regiment. More parting talks, more handgrips, more farewell music.

Within an hour or so the whole regiment had left. The two troop trains had vanished in the darkness. Following a military route, and a route which puzzled some of the men, the trains circuited Calcutta. They went south, then east, then north; and then, having cleared the city's outskirts, they followed the main line along the east bank of the Hooghly. Thirty miles north of Calcutta the trains were switched westward, and late at night when the troops were fast asleep they crossed the river. Now at last headed true for destination, and with a run of fifteen hundred miles before them, they sped along the direct route to the North West Frontier.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE NORTH WEST FRONTIER BEFORE OUR TIME : THE GREAT SURVEYS ; TRIBAL BORDERLAND'S STORY

ON the wintry morning of the third day, the two troop trains, an hour apart, arrived at Peshawar, where each wing of the regiment, as it came out of the cantonment station, was met by a band and played to barracks.

There, during the week that followed, all things we saw reminded us of the great change that our journey of fifteen hundred miles had brought us. We were now in a country that was different in every way to that region from which we had come. We were close to the outermost limits of British India, and we were in a land that was Afghan in nature and aspect. Our cantonment lay under the shadow of Afghan mountains. Our barracks stood beside the main road to Kabul. Our verandahs faced the Khyber hills, and the mouth of that famous pass that is a gateway to India on the route to Central Asia.

From an eminence in the cantonment the view to westward was bounded by the Afghan border hills. To the south could be seen a spur of the Sufaid Koh, or White Mountain range, extending eastwards to the Indus ; and to the north could be seen a level tract of country bounded by eastward extensions of the great masses of the Hindu Kush. Thus the view all round showed the plain of Peshawar enclosed on the west, south and north by a barrier of hills, which were parts of the immense mountain system that extends the whole way southward from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea.

From the plain of Peshawar northward this frontier province is entirely mountainous, and in this part are great altitudes. Here meet and blend the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. Here are several snowy peaks that dwarf the loftiest Alps. In Chitral is a mountain that towers to a height of 25,426 feet, and over on the east side of the Indus,

the Hazara district approaches that part of Kashmir territory where rises the mighty form of Nanga Parbat, white-robed giant of the Western Himalayas, and one of the highest mountains in the world. And in those northern parts passes are stupendous in height and steepness, gorges are formidable, valleys are but ravines, rivers from glacier sources are rapid, and near the Pamirs are great silent solitudes of snow and ice.

Of this northern region but little was known till the latter part of the nineteenth century. Up to that time available knowledge of the country was based on the accounts of adventurous travellers. But after the 1890's, obscurity no longer lingered. That eventful decade brought full light, for then were the wildest tracts of this mountainous frontier explored and mapped.

It was a fact too that up to this same period the boundary between India and Afghanistan had been uncertain and disputable. But now (in the early 1890's), it was considered that the time had come when the limits of the bordering territories should be fixed beyond question. The necessity for doing this had indeed become urgent, and the Government of India decided to despatch a mission to Kabul, there to enter into discussions with the Amir, and to seek his agreement to proposals that sought to determine the boundaries of territories that had been overrun and raided many a time by bordering tribesmen.

But the Amir did not like these proposals. He preferred to leave things as they were. Those marauding tribes might be troublesome to the Sirkar, but they were not so to him. And this proposed boundary would too strictly mark the limits of his authority. He did not want a demarcation that would show that certain tribes belonged to the other side of the line and therefore could not be subject to his rule.

Over some of these tribes the Amir exercised spiritual dominion, but he would fain have them also under his political control. Those particular tribes were of Afghan race. Their country lay north of the Khyber, and sloped down to the plain of Peshawar, that fruitful province which the Amir's ancestors had lost, and which he would like to regain some day. To the tribesmen of this tract the Amir was lord and protector. To Kabul they ever looked for consolation and support. To Kabul the bearers of their grievances went, and the Amir gave ear to their plaints.

So that conference within the fortified palace at Kabul was not brief. It lasted not one day, or two days, but several weeks. The patience of the negotiators was tried. The Amir had to be humoured and could not be hurried. He

held out and procrastinated, and yielded at last only when persuasive appeal had been strengthened by the proffered increase of six lakhs of rupees to his annual subsidy. He signed the agreement. But he did not sign the map that illustrated this agreement, and he reserved his right to dispute the boundary in detail during the process of demarcation.

However, the main object of the mission was now achieved. Abdur Rahman, the astute, wary, and stubborn Amir, had actually put his signature to the chief document that gave authority for the great survey. The agreement was secured, and the negotiators came back to Peshawar in smiles of triumph.

But not soon could effect be given to the terms of that signed document. Months passed before the picked staff could take the field, for vast was the task to be undertaken. One thousand, four hundred miles of tortuous mountain territory had to be surveyed. A boundary had to be traced and marked all the way from Chitral to the Persian desert. And all this could not be done by one party. The enormous stretch of frontier had to be divided into three sections, to each of which a separate detachment of surveyors was allotted.

Here indeed was a great scheme of survey and exploration, through wildest and most sequestered territory, over mountain, through defiles and across deserts. And not everywhere was demarcation unmolested. Over long distances the surveyors trod on hostile ground. Armed protection was needed wherever the theodolite and the plane table went. In some tracts there was tribal menace, and in Waziri territory, a fierce onslaught was made one night upon the surveyors' camp by tribesmen who slew a British subaltern of sappers before they were beaten off by troops.

For the detachment that undertook demarcation through the territory from the Gomal river to the Koh-i-Malik Siah on the verge of Persia, there lay before them eight hundred miles of stark desert country. Here was a region of "volcanic wastes and horned snakes," where the sun was powerful, and where, in the midst of blinding and darkening sandstorms, surveyors were lost for days. But the demarcators' toilsome pursuit went on from month to month and through all seasons, and not until two years had passed was the work in this region accomplished.

And meanwhile there had taken the field the contingent organized for the tracing of the northernmost section of the boundary—that part that extended from the western end of the Khyber through the Kunar Valley to Chitral. But here

great obstacles arose. The surveyors found that they could not proceed with their work according to the agreement. The Amir now disputed the terms of that agreement. He submitted fresh views relating to those northern parts, and claimed dominion over most important tribal territories.

This was a great embarrassment. But the enterprise was not abandoned. The demarcators went ahead, and despite restriction, still did good work. By their skill as surveyors, and by a "trick of the trade," they contrived to make geography, though under the eyes of one who was the agent of Kabul. Northward the mission explored its way, but not to the northernmost end of that Kunar Valley, for the neighbouring country was disturbed, and the little fort of Chitral was besieged. At Nashgaon they pitched camp, and there, ruled by events, they stayed not three days but three months. And useful work was done. The boundary between Kafiristan and Chitral was determined.

But something more than this was achieved while the mission was in that region. Pursuit of the surveyors' duty led to exploration in one of the wildest and most secluded tracts on the earth.

To make observations, to ascertain the true geography of this region, the commission sought a view from some towering height. But the mountain that would serve for this purpose was a long way off. It lay away to the north-east in primeval Kafiristan, and thither an expedition pursued its way. After four days of toilsome progress the mountain was reached and ascended. And when the surveyors had set down their plane table upon a commanding summit, they saw away to the north the colossal white form of Tirach Mir, that rises to a height of 25,560 feet; and apart from that great spectacle, they beheld, in the words of one of the party: "a world ringed with snow—line upon line, ridge upon ridge, of snowbound mountain top, encircling the horizon in one vast sea of billows."

Here, then, the object of the expedition was achieved. The surveyors made their observations and checked their reckonings. Then, having packed their plane-tables and theodolites, they came down from the mountain, and the whole expedition, surveyors and escort, having set out for the distant camp, retraced its way through the depths of a wilderness that may not have been trodden by European feet since Alexander's hardy Macedonians had struggled through here more than two thousand, two hundred years before.

It was now April. Four months had passed since the contingent had left the banks of the Kabul river, and headed northward into the Kunar Valley. Away in the distant

plains winter had vanished, and the time had come when verdure was tinting many a roadside border in cantonments, when birds on budding branches sang welcome to sunnier days, and the first butterflies were about. Yet here in the face of the Hindu Kush winter still reigned, and the enormous snowy expanses dazzled the eye and awed the mind. But now the time had come for the expedition to bid adieu to these scenes. The commission's labours were over. All that could be done it had done. It had not been permitted to extend the Durand Line into those northern parts, but it had otherwise accomplished useful work. And now finished, the detachment of surveyors and their escort, a thousand souls in all, left the camp for good, turned away from the wintry mountains and the great snows, and facing southwards, went down the valley of the Kabul's most copious tributary, and into the country where the breath of spring was in the air and the sun was warming the land.

But the tracing of Frontier boundaries on the north and west was not yet finished. From the Pamirs there came a call to the surveyor. In that region there had arisen the need to demarcate the bordering territories of the Czar and Amir, and to do this in such a way as would ease those military minds who feared that sooner or later the Bear might come through the northern passes into Chitral and Kashmir. On this matter an agreement had been reached between Great Britain and Russia, and it was arranged that the demarcation should be carried out jointly by two surveying commissions—one deputed from each of the two powers.

In due time the British commission was despatched from India. It set out upon its journey to the Pamirs in the height of summer, travelled north-west through Kashmir, toiled through the steep passes of the Hindu Kush, where it suffered snow-blindness, and on a day in late July, arrived at the place where the Russian commission was encamped on the verge of Lake Victoria, which is 13,400 feet above sea-level. There the little party, fatigued and begrimed, were received with honour. They were welcomed and treated with stately hospitality, and from that moment till the day when the joint labours ended, all was hearty fellowship between the two camps.

And during the weeks they laboured on the heights of the world's greatest plateau, the surveyors knew no summer. While down on the plains the sun scorched the land, here icy blasts peeled the skin off faces, and pierced to the bone through sheepskin coats. Again and again did wintry weather baffle reconnaissance. There were nights when the burthen of snow broke down tents, and mornings when the

surveyors awoke to find the Pamirs all white and not a blade of grass to be seen.

The task now undertaken by the surveyors was the marking of a boundary that should extend from that "Blue Lake" eastward to territory where the limits of Chinese occupation were uncertain—and that was in the region where meet the three great dominions: Russia, China, and India. In one part of that stretch of ninety miles, there was no need for building stone pillars, and that was the tract between the Great and Little Pamirs, where the giant peaks of Range Nicolas served as boundary marks in an immense expanse of snowfields and glacier. But from the Benderski Pass eastward such natural features did not exist for definition, and there came a time when the lay of the land puzzled the demarcator and brought a pause to operations.

Now the men on the spot found that the terms of an agreement drafted by diplomats in remote capitals could no longer be brought into accord with the geography of the Pamirs, and this being so, each side sought and received advice from its Government. In the circumstances the only thing that could be done was done. The last possible pillar having been set up, the boundary, in the words of the surveyor, "was projected into a voiceless waste of a vast white wilderness 20,000 feet above the sea, absolutely inaccessible to man, and within the ken of no living creature but the Pamir eagles."

Here, then, demarcation was brought to an end. The object of the joint commission was accomplished. The last pillar to mark the bounds of dominions in this vast lonesome and silent region of snow and ice was put up on the 9th September, and this done, preparations were made forthwith to leave the Pamirs. And then, as it were, to celebrate the end of a historic survey, the men of the two nations with hearty accord, decided to light a great bonfire and make festival on the last night of their stay upon the Roof of the World.

For a bonfire fuel was abundant. Having made provision for the possibility that boundary-making might keep them in this region during the winter, the parties had gathered in a great store of firewood, and this now was the fuel that gave forth such an illumination as perhaps had never been seen before on the Pamirs. For hours during a freezing night, while the moon shone full and beautifully, and snow-drifts sparkled in its light, the huge fire blazed high, and the glow from its fierce core reddened every cheek. And around the great bonfire, the men in the service of the Sirkar, with

the men in the service of the Czar, Britisher and Russ, joined in a wild merrymake, during which there was drinking of grog that had been brewed in a Russian cauldron, and dancing to wild music by Cossacks and Kirghiz, Afghans and Kashmiris.

On the following morning, when blackened fragments of wood, and a pile of cold ashes, were all the visible relics of that night's strange revel, the expeditions parted company, leaving the Pamir wilderness to its eternal silence and solitude. The Russians, having packed their baggage on camels started away eastward, following the course of the Aksu. The British party headed westward, and made haste as best they could along the steep and formidable tracks that overhang the Wakhan river, for though it was but mid-September, all signs were showing that this region would soon be in the iron embrace of winter. Blue-black louring clouds and icy winds gave warning of the imminence of the great snowfalls that close defiles and raise impassable barriers for two-thirds of the year. Not a moment then was there to spare. Delay might now spell doom.

At daybreak on the 21st September the party could dimly see in the distance the crest of the Darkot Pass, that is fifteen thousand feet high. Between them and that point there lay a perilous maze of glacier crevasses, to traverse which they had to trust to their little beasts of burthen, and these did not fail them. These were the guides that, given their heads and left to their instinct, led the way and made the tracks upon which man followed.

And thus did the party progress as best they could till soon after midday, when suddenly a great dense snow cloud descended in front and closed the view ahead, while there blew an icy blast that chilled to the bone. Man and beast were now brought to a standstill and there was apprehension. If that cloud did not lift, and if that icy blast prevailed, and snow set in, all might be lost. But that cloud did not settle. It passed away in a minute, and the little party, half frozen, moved again, struggled on, and made headway. In the afternoon they had gained the pass, and when now they looked behind, they saw more vast, snow-laden clouds rolling up. But these did not pass away. These clouds settled and took possession of the heights and defiles. The season's hour had struck. Winter's mighty forces had arrived to bar the passes of the Hindu Kush for eight months. But the little struggling expedition had escaped. Their peril was past. They were now on the safe side of the pass, beyond the crevasses, and beyond the danger of overwhelming snows and freezing blasts. Now the way was downward into the country of Yasin, where they once more caught sight of



poplars and willows, and rejoiced to see before them a genial and fruitful Kashmir valley in the mellow beauty of autumn's tints.

Thus ended an expedition and survey that brought gains to geography and military knowledge, that settled an international affair, and that interposed a long strip of Afghan territory between Russian Turkestan and the North West Frontier of India.

But only two years after the bounds of dominions had been marked in the great silent wastes of the towering Pamirs, demand came again for the surveyor's service within the North West Frontier. There a widespread tribal insurrection had again brought military columns into the hills. Wild and unexplored defiles and valleys were trodden by British troops. On the heels of the forces went the men of the plane-table and theodolite, and at the end of a long campaign the Durand Line was finally established in disputed parts that bordered the territories of hostile tribes.

Thus from exploration, surveying and mapping, from the lessons of military campaigning and civil negotiations, and from extended communications, there had come about in the latter part of the last century, a great advance in our knowledge and understanding of this North Western region.

And then, at the dawn of the twentieth century, there was revived that idea that had been on record since the eighteen-seventies—the proposal to sever those frontier territories from the Punjab and make them into a separate province. The powers who ruled India now decided that the time had come to give effect to this proposal. In due course the Act was passed. The territory between the Indus and Afghanistan, together with one district on the east side of the river, was detached from the administration of the Punjab, constituted as the North West Frontier Province, and thus brought under the direct control of the Government of India.

Now that we have noted the main physical aspects of the Frontier, have recalled the great surveys, the making of the Durand Line, the establishment of the Pamir boundary, and the creation of this territory into a separate province, we may, in order to complete this introduction, add a few further remarks on the Frontier's system, and the Frontier's tribal peoples.

First of all it may be said that the term North West Frontier means not one frontier, but, in a certain sense, three frontiers, or three borderlands, that are based on two boundaries: an outer boundary known as the Durand Line, and an inner boundary known as the Administrative Border. The Durand Line, which commemorates the name of Sir

Mortimer Durand (leader of the mission to Kabul in 1893), is the true boundary between the Indian Empire and Afghanistan. The territory on the west side of that line is therefore foreign ground, and the crossing of the boundary by military forces from one side or the other would signify war. But though the line is an international boundary, it is not closely guarded, and the man who steps across it from one side or the other may do so without fear of challenging sentry. By the seeker of sanctuary, by the fugitive from tribal vengeance or savage law, it has probably been crossed many a time. And who knows how often it has been crossed by men whose doings had the secret support of Kabul?

Now, whereas the outer, or Durand Line, is the boundary between India and Afghanistan, the inner line known as the Administrative Border, is regarded as the boundary of British India proper in this north-western region. It marks the extent of British Indian territory within the Frontier Province. As the term denotes, it is the limit of the administered areas, or the "settled districts," which include the plain that extends from the Indus to the hills.

Between the inner and outer boundaries—between the Administrative Border and the Durand Line—lies the main Frontier country, the great central belt of tortuous territory that extends from Chitral in the north to Baluchistan in the south. Within this tract the Sirkar's writ does not run, but political control, in varying measure, and adapted to circumstances, is exercised by officers who are known as "political agents." These areas are known as "agency districts," and in a coloured map they are shown in yellow, while the settled, or administered, districts, are shown in red.

This middle Frontier region is far larger than the administered tract. Its area amounts to nearly two-thirds of the province. Here is the main homeland of the various Pathan tribes. And it is a wild and mountainous country. There are some fertile and cultivated patches here and there, but the greater part of the region is sterile, and is subject to intense heat in summer, and intense cold in winter. But, for all that, this is the soil and climate that have bred the strongest and most stalwart race within the borders of India—a race of stubborn, militant, predatory tribesmen, fanatics in the Moslem faith, and numbering more than three million armed men.

Here centuries have little changed the character and ways of man. From generation to generation the children of those hills grow to manhood and live as their fathers. From the day of his earliest reasoning a boy hears but of tribal warring, feuds, raiding and bold adventure, and as his arms gain

strength, and his wits sharpen, he learns the use of the gun to defend himself, to uphold a kinsman's cause in a blood feud, or, as a follower of the Prophet, when *jehad*, or holy war, is preached, to fight in a *lashkar*, or armed force, risen against the *Sirkar*, or Government.

In this region nature's stint imposes struggle. Life in mud-walled village, in cavernous retreat, or in rude watch-tower, is never far from want, and often subsistence may be but barely won. There is a lack of occupation. Many join the *Sirkar's* armed forces, and some emigrate, but the bulk of this strong race of men cling to their beloved native hills, and here stress of existence is a spur to daring. Man of brigand blood in a region where things are wanting, thinks of a region where things abound. And the things that are longed for are not to be found anywhere in the hills, but in the level country to eastward. In that direction chance is ever beckoning. And so the plains are the preying ground of the hills. For centuries that fact has been making history in the North West Frontier.

Here, early in the nineteenth century, the Afghan was forced to yield his territory to the Sikh. But by the middle of the same century, Sikh power was no more, having fallen with the Punjab dominion of Rungeet the Lion. Then came the *Sahib*, and his *raj* was beneficent. In the valley of Peshawar tracks became roads, wastes were reclaimed and tilled, and bore good crops. The peaceable were succoured, and fear no longer put the gun in a man's hands in open day. Beasts in the field were no longer watched by an armed guard, and oxen could be driven to pasture by a little boy with a twig in his hand.

But though there was more protection henceforth against daylight plunder, and though the tiller no longer ploughed with a musket slung from his shoulder lest he might be taken at a disadvantage, yet raiding did not cease. If the raider might not venture by day he might come by night; and, besides, as the plain was improved and became more productive, it yielded more things to tempt the brigand. In village, bazar, and town, where the *Sirkar's* order prevailed, men of the "Hindko" race prospered. The trader, the money-lender, and the petty banker flourished, and their riches and their jewelled children brought the robber and the kidnapper, whose gun commanded all in a rapid overpowering raid.

And in the hills from which the marauder came, in "independent territory," the cockpit of the Frontier, and the refuge of the outlaw from the administered tract—the tribes increased in numbers and became better armed. And they

became not more submissive, but bolder and more aggressive. Again and again were limits crossed by armed bands to snipe, to raid and plunder, or to abduct for high ransom. And again and again did the brigandage, or blood guilt, or fanatic insurgency of one tribe or another, force Government to mobilize the Frontier forces and despatch strong columns of troops into the recesses of wild hills and valleys.

Such, then, was the region that our regiment, fresh and strange from remote Bengal, beheld for the first time on that grey winter's morning. Such was the North West Frontier, the turbulent country of the martial Pathan hillmen, the strategic borderland beyond the Indus, the four hundred miles of tortuous mountain barrier whose passes are roads for the invasion and conquest of India.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE LION, THE BEAR, AND THE BUFFER

THE North West Frontier had been severed from the Punjab and constituted a separate province only a few years before our regiment arrived at Peshawar. But the change by this time was well established, and hardly a trace remained of the former regime. "North West Frontier Province," had now become a common expression, while "Punjab Frontier" had passed from speech and document.

But though they had dropped out of use for the affairs of the day, those two words were yet of great historical import. They evoked half a century of military experience in these parts. They recalled the story of the Frontier from the time when Gough's final battle overthrew the Sikhs, when the Punjab was annexed, and the troops of "John Company" crossed the Indus to occupy Frontier posts, and to raise for special service that contingent of several regiments known as "The Punjab Irregular Frontier Force,"—the initials of which are today still worn on many a shoulder strap.

From the time of that event mentioned (the annexation of the Punjab) till the date on which our regiment joined the Peshawar garrison, there had been a record of no less than fifty military campaigns, big and little, caused by risings or aggressions of one or other of the various Pathan tribes. And the last one of these risings was said to have been "a big affair." In the fastnesses of the Afridi hills a large mustering of armed tribesmen had challenged the power of the *Sirkar*, or Government, and resisted a field force of forty thousand troops.

But that event had now passed into history. Young men knew little or nothing about it, and a breast showing a medal ribbon for the campaign had become a rare sight. And after the army had come back from those bleak Afridi valleys, no occasion had arisen for Government to mobilize large forces in this part of the Frontier. Indeed at this time it could be

recorded that except in Waziristan, where a blockade had been imposed against brigandage, there had been no call for military operations beyond the Indus during a period of ten years.

In the neighbouring kingdom of Afghanistan also there had been no serious outbreak during this period. Death had brought a change to the throne of Kabul, and a son now reigned in a father's stead, but the new Amir was on good terms with the Sirkar. And what of the Amir's potent neighbour on the Oxus? What of that great Czarist empire whose territories bordered Afghanistan on the north and north-west, and at one point approached within a morning's ride of Chitral?

For reasons that were well understood, Russia at that time was less feared than she had been some years before, and her supposed menace to north-western India which in the eighteen-eighties and 'nineties had been so much apprehended, was little written about or talked about. The "Bear" had ceased to be a bogey, and mention of "Russia's advance to India" no longer alarmed. Besides an achievement in diplomacy had just then eased the tension that had hitherto prevailed on account of the rival policies of the two great powers in Afghanistan and other countries bordering India. To adjust contrary claims in these territories, an agreement had been signed between Great Britain and Russia, and this was assumed to settle all matters that had long been in question between the two powers.

The signature of this agreement was regarded as an event of great consequence. It was noted with close attention in all the capitals of Europe, and the British press was full of praise for the diplomacy that had brought it about. The Order of the Garter was worthily conferred on the British minister who had been the diligent negotiator in this great affair, and by those who most warmly commended the diplomat's work, the treaty was hailed as a guarantee for the safety of India against invasion.

Some critics, it is true, shook their heads, and among those doubters were men who knew those Asiatic borderlands very well. But, anyhow, what had been accomplished by diplomacy had cleared the air. Those two big European powers had come to an understanding. Each had declared its policy in black and white, and each had accepted the other's assurances.

To the men on the spot, to the army that lay in barrack and camp, strategy along the North West Frontier and in Central Asia had not been altered by diplomacy. The pact went very well so far as it went. It was good news that

Russia had agreed to regard Afghanistan as "outside the sphere of her influence." But that promise apart, matters remained as they had been, and those who sought to belittle the diplomat's work might point out that after all Russia had yielded no ground. She had withdrawn from no advanced post. Where she had hitherto stood she remained.

Russia's position in Central Asia indeed seemed dominant. There was evidence of a bold and forward policy. The map showed that in the region bordering Afghanistan and India great strategic advantages had been secured. Russia had pushed her railways far afield, and though it might be held that these lines were needed anyhow in order to give access to these regions and to develop their resources, yet it appeared that they had been planned to serve an ultimate military purpose—they were based on strategy. And it was a fact that this railway-building had been followed by military occupation. Here and there in posts throughout Turkestan, the Czar had in those days over 200,000 White Troops, or a European force nearly three times the strength of Great Britain's White Army in India.

And the Amir's country seemed commanded by those Russian railways. On the north-west, the branch line from Merv in Turkestan, had been brought up to the verge of Afghan territory, and its railhead at Kushk pointed to Herat as a place of easy conquest for a resolute European force. North of the Oxus, the Central Asian line which ran through to Moscow, was connected with the Trans-Caspian Railway at Khojend, and the joint system had been extended onwards to the east of Turkestan. There its terminal was Andijan, which served as a point of approach into the heart of the Pamirs—that enormous elevated mass of valleys and mountain ridges, that immense plateau around which lie the loftiest mountain systems, and the vastest icefields and snowy expanses on the face of the earth.

Can an army operate on this Pamir plateau? was a question that had been asked in those days, and one answer that had been given was: "No; owing to their extent, their barrenness, their severe climate, their rarefied atmosphere, the Pamirs are inaccessible to large bodies of troops." But even so, it was a fact that some Russian troops had been on this mighty plateau for many years. There, indeed, the Pamirski outpost was a token of military occupation. There, Cossacks kept watch on the Roof of the World.

In this region Russian Turkestan is separated from India by a narrow belt of Afghan territory that extends eastwards to the Chinese border. On the map this looks like a buffer designedly interposed between one dominion and another.

and that in fact it was so intended to be by the demarcators. At the western part this strip is so narrow that at one point Russian territory is separated from Chitral by a neck of land only eight miles wide. But what matters here is not the width of this tract, but the lie of the land, the nature of the country, the terrain. Here is the mighty Hindu Kush where nature's forces have raised formidable impediments to thwart military man.

And with those immense natural barriers in mind there arose the question : could a powerful invader force a passage through this north-western corner ? In other words : could the Pamirs be crossed by an army and Chitral entered by those passes of the Hindu Kush ? "Impossible," declared some without a moment's hesitation. "Not at all impossible," said others.

Many minds, if not most minds, relied on the former view. It was thought that the Pamir position was securely defended by the Hindu Kush, and that those great mountains guarded India in that section of the frontier. To those who best knew, the very mention of this region filled the mind with thoughts of towering precipices, giant glaciers, and immense silent expanses of snow. Here it appeared as if geography and climate had built a fortress that needed no garrison.

The Pamirs spelt military impracticalities, and assurances on this score came from men who had explored and mapped this region. The chief officer of the Pamir boundary survey had recorded that even without that buffer we have mentioned, "there is no possibility of a dangerous aggression on the part of Russia, for no military force ever did, or ever can, get through." But some strategists still believed that something might be achieved by this way across the Pamirs, by the "Ferghana route," as they called it—the northernmost, the most difficult, but undoubtedly by far the shortest, of three considered approach routes for the conquest of India.

It was a fact, anyhow, that this route had been well reconnoitred by the Power that was dominant on the Oxus. Between 1880 and 1901, the Pamirs had again and again been crossed by detachments from the armies of the Czar—by squadrons of cavalry, by sections of artillery, and by a battalion of infantry. Indeed on one occasion reconnaissance had been pushed so far that beyond all doubt the limits of the Czar's dominions were overstepped, and a detachment of Cossacks exploring southwards from the Tagdumbash Pamir entered Hunza territory in Kashmir.

Few, however, believed that an invasion would ever be attempted directly from the Pamirs. In the opinion of those who had gained first-hand knowledge of this region, a more



probable line of advance, and easier route for approach to the same objective, for an invading army from Turkestan, lay eastward of the base of the "pointing finger" through the province of Badakshan—across north-eastern Afghanistan, say, from the Oxus to the Dorah Pass. Here, too, no doubt, the invader would find his path beset by great obstacles, but he might contrive to get past them. Under skilled command, great forces bent upon this enterprise would probably find a way.

The Czar's military chiefs, no doubt, had the chances of this possible route in view at the time when it was decided to build a branch railway from the Trans-Caspian system down to the Oxus. And if this line were extended (as eventually it was extended) along the bank of that river, the object of the extension could not be mistaken. The eye gazing at the map would trace a possible line of approach from a ford and railhead on the Oxus to that Dorah Pass. And so once more apprehensions would arise; once more would signs be read for the worst. The projects of the railway-building "Roos" would cause uneasiness to the head that wore the crown of the Amirate, and military men and diplomats would declare that beyond doubt the Bear was approaching the gates of India.

However, all the railway-building had not been on the Czar's side of Afghanistan. It had been going on also on the Indian side of the Buffer State. On that side railheads were far advanced and served the most strategic points, the lines being so designed as to provide for the quick transport of mobilized forces to any of those frontier gates that an invader might attempt to force.

From the Baluch section of the frontier, the railway had been built on from Quetta to Chaman on the Afghan verge, an extension which pointed north-west to Khandahar, which was sixty-seven miles distant. And it was well understood that to Khandahar this line would be built as a counter-move if, on the opposite side, the Russians advanced their line from Kushk to Herat—which would also be an extension of sixty-seven miles.

Further north, in the central part of the Frontier, the most important advanced posts were served by lines that connected with the main Indian railway system on the east side of the river Indus, and with the chief military base at Rawalpindi, the headquarters of what was then known as the Northern Army. To the south of the Peshawar plain, a railway on the metre gauge had been built westwards from the Indus to Kohat, and thence to Thal, in the Kurram Valley. To the north of the Peshawar plain another light railway had been built from Nowshera to Dargai, near the Malakand

Pass. From Peshawar cantonment, the Frontier terminal of the main North Western Railway system, a broad gauge line had been extended to Jamrud, a post within two miles of the mouth of the Khyber Pass, to which point troops could be railed conveniently from any part of India.

Now to some minds this military railway terminal at Jamrud prompted an idea which might be expressed in these words: having come so far why not build your railway right through to the Khyber's western end at Lundi Khana, and thence, if possible, onwards to Kabul? And this was a matter that drew expression of a man's opinion on Frontier policy. To say "yes" to that question would imply that you were in favour of the "Forward Policy." To say "no" would imply that you were opposed to that policy.

But at the particular period to which this narrative relates, the building of a railway across the Afghan frontier was not discussed merely as a matter of military need. It was now discussed more for its importance as the first possible step in a great civil project to connect the railway systems of two continents. So improved now were the relations between Great Britain and Russia that some people fancied that the time had come to forge a link that would join the Indian and Russian railway systems by building a connecting line across the Amir's kingdom from frontier to frontier—that is from the Indian terminal to the Russian terminal.

This idea captured the fancy of the press. Under bold headlines, articles on the proposal appeared in newspapers and periodicals. Writers dwelt on the great advantages that would be secured by this railway. They pointed out that it would carry the London mails to India in eight days. They explained how it would be a potent instrument for the development of Afghanistan; and it was shown how the Afghan capital, Kabul, would be brought into communication with the capitals of Europe—with St. Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, Rome, Paris, and the port of Calais on the English Channel.

In fact at this time there had already been undertaken the execution of a scheme which might, or might not, be regarded as the first step towards the accomplishment of this conceived design to connect the Indian and Russian railway systems. The building of a railway from the Indian frontier into Afghanistan had already been sanctioned by the Government of India. But this was not to be a railway from Quetta to Khandahar and onwards, nor was it to be a railway designed to go through the Khyber Pass. It was a railway intended to enter Afghanistan by the way the great river of that country comes through the hills into the valley of Peshawar.

From a point about midway on the broad gauge military line that extends from Peshawar cantonment to Jamrud, the route traced for the new railway led northward to a place near where the Kabul river issues from a deep mountain gorge and debouches into the valley of Peshawar. Here, south of the river's right bank, it turned westward to pass through the frontier hills towards the Afghan boundary. But in this tract no welcome was there for such enterprise. The railway engineer laboured under the eyes of an ill-disposed tribe, a sullen tribe that had more than once risen against the Sirkar. It was a *khel* of Afghan race, and in homage it ever looked towards Kabul. Its men were heart and hand for the Amir, and the Amir was for them.

The construction of this railway had already begun at the time when our regiment came to Peshawar, and the fact was brought to our notice one December morning soon after our arrival in the station. For the practice of some little scheme or other, the battalion that morning had marched out to a place a few miles west of the cantonment, and there while we stood in front of the hills, the commanding officer from horseback delivered to us a lecture on that part of the country then within view.

On this subject the colonel was well informed. His knowledge of the country extended back to the time when, as a subaltern, he served here with another battalion of Ours. His address was instructive and impressive. He had a good "command voice," and every word he uttered fell upon attentive ears. He spoke with emphasis and clearness, as he always did when addressing his battalion, and not a syllable of his utterance could be misunderstood by anyone who heard him.

In turn pointing to the south-west, to the west, and then to the north-west where winter snows had made remote mountains scenes of picturesque grandeur, our commander explained to us the geography of the country, pointed out the routes followed by the great invaders who had forced the north-western passes, and summed up the character and condition of the most noted warlike tribes whose territories in part were then within sight.

Thus passing from one matter to another, and imparting a great deal of information in most intelligible terms, our lecturer finally mentioned that railway. Indeed he could not help doing so for a part of the line was plain to be seen from the spot where the battalion then stood. There before our eyes and asking the question what for, was that piece of engineering work lately executed, a newly-built section of permanent way laid with new tar-smelling sleepers and brand-new Bessemer steel rails. There was that piece of

track on the broad gauge that curve away gracefully like a branch from the main line, but that some day might become a section of a railway that would cross two continents on a route from Calcutta to Calais.

But about this possibility our colonel had not much to say, and what he said was probably the limit of authorised information on the subject at the time.

Looking away remotely towards the north, and pointing out the route which the line would follow, and the place where it would turn to cross the wild hills, our commander said that the railway would not terminate at a point inside the Afghan border. No ; it would be built further westward and westward along by the river, and some day it would "go bang on to Kabul."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE CALL

As related in the preceding chapter, the agreement between Great Britain and Russia concerning the regions bordering India had been signed only a few weeks before our regiment arrived at Peshawar, and as the ruler of Afghanistan and the Government of India had at that time also come to an understanding, some people then spoke or wrote as if these successes in diplomacy promised a long spell of peace and settlement in those North Western borders.

But, meanwhile, the men on the spot, those whom duty had brought face to face by day as if they were unaware of this favourable turn of events in the domain of high diplomacy, as if Russia had never signed that peace-promising pact with her rival, and as if Kabul had not been conciliated. And certainly there were no signs of any easement in the springs of defence on the fringes of frontier boundaries, or in any part of those territories where dominions met. Each side still took care to "tie the camel's foot." The strengths and dispositions of forces remained as they had been. Every advanced post was still held, not a sentry anywhere had been withdrawn, and, as has been shown, the building of railways for a military purpose had not come to a stop.

Within cantonments a system that had been in operation for years was unchanged. Guards occupied the same places, and sentinels had to be as alert as ever. Main guard buildings were protected by barbed wire, and the wall in front of a sentry's beat was capped by dummy stone heads. At night there was the same wary procedure when the approaching orderly officer replied to the sentry's challenge. And not till the sergeant by the light of a lantern had unlocked a narrow gate in a meshwork of barbed wire, was "visiting rounds" at length bidden to advance and come through the barrier.

But protection was not confined to regular regimental and garrison guards. Inside lines there was also armed watch by night. For this purpose each company of a battalion furnished two flying sentries who patrolled round their own barracks. These sentries, who were peculiar to the North West Frontier, were called "prowlers." They wore neither belt nor bandolier, and they were armed, not with a rifle, but with a smooth-bore musket, for which each man carried five buckshot cartridges in his pocket. And instead of heavy boots, they wore soft shoes of canvas uppers and yarn soles.

The prowlers' duty, which was done in reliefs, commenced at Last Post and ended at Reveille. The orderly officer did not visit the sentries, but once during the night a sergeant or a corporal went round the lines to see that all was well—a duty that was known as "visiting prowlers." Each company's pair of sentries passed the time sauntering up and down round their own bungalows, and now and again standing for a while at some spot to observe and listen, or to chat in low tones. The patrolling was noiseless. The sentries' footsteps could not be heard. Their soft shoes gave them a tread as quiet as a bear's. And dressed as they were they did not look at all military. Indeed at those moments when they carried the slingless muskets at "the secure," they looked more like fowlers than flying sentries patrolling within regimental lines.

In spirit two men "on prowlers" were not the same as two men in the barrack-room, in the canteen, on a march, fatigue or quarter-guard. "On prowlers" mind opened to mind. On no other occasion did companionship draw such candour and confidence from man to man as it did in those lonesome hours amid the darkness of the barrack area, and the deep silence broken only at half hours by the tap on a guard-room gong, and the guard sentry's loud cry that all was well in the little area of the North West Frontier within the orbit of his vigilance.

How came the name "prowlers" to be applied to those irregular flying sentries? Perhaps not a man in the garrison then could have readily answered that question. Possibly the term may have been adopted to suggest the manner in which the sentry was to perform this duty. He had to move quietly and stealthily, and not in the manner of a guard sentry on his beat. He was to "prowl," and the quarry for which he looked out was the trans-frontier thief who was ever seeking to enter barrack lines in quest of that which to his mind was the most precious thing in the world—the magazine rifle.

Of that fact we were aware before we came to Peshawar. Well had we been tutored on the subject before we left our

last station, and now that we were within view of the Frontier hills, the rifle thief was our great bogey man. We had to mind our rifles now as never we had minded them before. The security of arms was our first concern. And woeful to the owner would be the loss of a rifle—it was said that on the North West Frontier a man might as well lose his life as lose his rifle. Consequently in the room in each barrack where the rifles were kept, nothing was left undone to defeat that cunning and daring man, the Afridi. The rifles of two sections were placed in a rack of special design, and were secured by a steel rod which passed through the trigger guards and was padlocked at the end. The man who kept the key of the padlock was known as the "rifle orderly." That responsible fellow slept on a cot alongside the rifle rack.

But if arms had to be minded so carefully in barracks, how much more carefully had they to be minded by two of our companies who, soon after the arrival of the regiment in Peshawar, went away into camp for training in a place near the Afridi hills? There, indeed, was greatest risk of all. But we knew what had to be done. We were wideawake, and we had heard what had happened to other troops that had camped in the same territory. The story of the experience of another regiment had come to our knowledge. And this regiment had not been negligent. It was said that its men as they lay down to sleep in their tents at night bound their rifles to their bodies with cords. But this plan did not baffle the Afridi. At reveille rifles were missing. The thieves had entered the camp during the night, and having come to a tent, got hold of the ends of the ground sheets on which the sleeping men lay, and drew then gently out of the tents. The cords were cut in an instant, the thieves secured the rifles, got away across the line that marked the Sirkar's administered limits, and regained the territory of their brigand tribe where the worth of their booty, and the proof of their daring, won them greatness.

Now the method of security which our companies adopted in that camp was simple, and it did not fail. We relied on vigilance. We trusted to the open eye. We watched and we watched by night. Our tents were tents of watchfulness. In every section everyone except the section commander acted as sentinel in turns of an hour from Last Post till Reveille. And outside through the night the prowlers patrolled in pairs, and they were doubly armed, for as the men could not leave their rifles in the tents, each while on this duty had to carry two weapons—a musket and his own rifle.

Guards, pickets, prowlers, and watchers of rifles in barrack and camp, men on actual duty and men under orders—what a change did all this activity spell for a regiment fresh from a remote down-country station! And even when off duty a man did not enjoy much freedom. Circumstances restricted. There were limits outside the cantonment beyond which it would not be safe for a man to stroll. Peshawar was not a "walking-out" station, and there was no call for passes. Peshawar city was out of bounds, and even if it were not so, a man might be well advised not to enter its gates. The cantonment bazar, the "Sudder Bazar," was "town" for the garrison, and though that place was not very far from our lines, seldom did one go there on foot. The Pshawari hackney driver with his tonga was always within hail of barracks. This offered speedy conveyance, and the bazar-goer could hire it for a few annas.

As the days passed, and the Frontier winter deepened, warmer clothing was needed against the keener cold. For barrack wear we were issued with jackets that were padded "British warmers." A log fire blazed on each barrack-room hearth, and every night, after Post, or canteen closing a group of men would sit around this fire and gossip away the time till 10.15. Then, "lights out" sounding, voices would be lowered. But the lights were not then extinguished. For a good reason the lamps were left burning in the barrack-room all night.

As in winter there were here no parades in the early morning, we enjoyed "long sleeps." There was little movement about barracks, before eight and duties were usually over before one o'clock. Then, "finished for the day," most men slept under blankets for some time during the afternoon. And meanwhile outside all was peace, and the stillness of the air was intense. The barracks and cantonment were hushed, and only now and again was the deep calm broken by a bugle-call, or by the trot and jingle of a tonga horse.

Those winter days seemed short. Those still afternoons soon faded into dusk. Not long after the snowy summit of a towering mountain beyond the Afridi country had reflected the departing rays of sunset, the gloom gathered, and the Frontier mountain could be seen no more. By this time man, camel and pony had vanished from the great highway that goes to Kabul. And though that same road was within view of our barracks, and passed along the fringe of our lines, it became strange and unfrequented after darkness set in. It was a shunned road after dusk. A Pathan had said that the very trees along the borders of that road were not beyond suspicion at night. And from Post till dawn the only sounds that were heard along that lonesome and untrusted



way were the footsteps of armed patrols, and the challenge of the guard sentry : "halt, who goes there ?"

After a few weeks we had become used to the ways of our new station. We had become habituated to its routine, and had learnt all the things that a regiment new to the Frontier had to learn. And meanwhile the weather was all that man might wish. It was clear, cold and fine. But this fine spell ended in January. That month brought a break. Instead of days of bright, sunny skies, now came days of cloud and heavy rain. And as in this region heavy rainfall on the plain in mid-winter means heavy snowfall on the mountains, so one morning when we looked out towards the west we saw that even the slopes of the nearer hills were specked with white. Then was warmest clothing grateful, and there was not a man in the barrack-room who was not snug in his cot during the afternoons of those dark days of cold and rain.

It was about this time we came to know from hearsay, from movements in the garrison, and from certain duties which our regiment had been called upon to perform, that the Frontier was not entirely tranquil. In Peshawar, and indeed throughout the Frontier command, there were signs of greater wariness. There was more alertness on all posts, and greater care was taken to provide against surprise.

At our own main guard there were double sentries by night. Number one, the man who, on the central post, reported aloud every half hour, had on his left flank at the end of his beat, the support of another sentry who peered between two dummy stone heads across the road that led to the great Pass. On the other side of that road there were no barracks or military structures of any kind. There was but open country, a tract of the plain that extended away to the foot of the barrier hills where it touched tribal territory. In that open area all might be well by day, for then the light was policeman, but uncertainty came with the night. Then no man could say that those miles of dark ground between the cantonment and the foothills were clear of the bandit.

But there were nights when the strength of that main guard was more than enough to furnish reliefs for those two double sentries. There were nights when a reinforcement under an officer crowded out the guard-room and filled every cot. And those too were the nights when an inlying picket, a whole company, slept booted and equipped in their own barrack-rooms, for then had the warning news come through that the Frontier's greatest brigand had crossed the line and was at large within the territory of the Sirkar.

This raider was the fear of many in the country west of the Indus. He was the bogey of all the villages where children were hushed by the mention of his name. He had a strong

following, his men were well armed, and they were no mean shots. And if the Sirkar had spies, he had many friends, and when pressed by danger no village within command of his gun dare deny him refuge. Well did those on his trail know that to secure this outlaw would be no light affair. He was wily, he was daring, and he was determined; and it was said that he had taken an oath on the *Koran* that the men of the Sirkar's forces would never take him alive. And if those were his sworn words, he held by his oath when the time came. Surprised in open day by a troop of cavalry, he and his band, armed to the teeth, asked for no quarter, and when at the close of a deadly encounter, the leader fell to the charge of a lance, the *risala* had vacant saddles.

Now about that time of alarms, when guards were reinforced, and barrack-fuls of men slept under arms, we came to know that the tribe to which that noted raider belonged, was the tribe which had a hand in most of the raiding, plundering and kidnapping that for some time had been occurring in the central tract of the Frontier Province. Indeed its brigand exploits and its daring had become the talk of every bazar and village in the plain, and lately it had become still bolder and more defiant. In numbers it was a strong tribe. It was said to be well armed for hill fighting, and it vaunted at its skill at sniping and its guerilla tactics. But plainsmen knew that the hillmen's day of reckoning would surely come. They believed that sooner or later the iron arm of the Sirkar would be stretched forth to strike at the lashkar of that menacing Afridi khel.

At length, after a period of rumours about secret plans for punitive action, Government moved. Mobilisation became a fact. A large field force, quietly organised and equipped, advanced into the hills and entered the territory of the hostile tribe. Having moved with a rapidity that surprised the hillmen, the columns seized positions from which the tribal strongholds were easily mastered by the fire of light mountain guns and rifles. Resistance was soon overcome. The tribe was vanquished and had to submit to terms. The field force withdrew from the bleak hills and valleys. Demobilization ensued. And then came comments on the shortness of the campaign. The object of the punitive expedition had no doubt been well accomplished, but the swiftness of the operations, and the short time within which the tribesmen had been brought to submission, made the military enterprise look unimportant. The affair, after all, had lasted but a few days, and in a few days it was forgotten.

Weeks passed. The long cold winter of the North West had come to an end. Pathans and Afghans no longer wore sheepskins, and troops in barracks had now no more need

for those warm coats. Brighter, sunnier, and warmer grew the weather day by day. The face of the country smiled again. Vegetation put forth verdure and bloom, and the gardens of Peshawar assumed the vesture of spring.

And now that the hot weather had come, and as there was a lull on the Frontier, we had ceased for the time to think of raids, and raiders and warring tribes. Our thoughts and our talk now were of Cherat, an airy cantonment in hills that were a march of forty miles away. There we supposed half our regiment would spend the season. The date of the move had not yet been announced, but we believed that within a week or two, the four chosen companies, with the regimental headquarters, would be packing for the march.

We were still looking forward to this change, we were still wondering which would be the four companies on whom the choice would fall for the hill station, when a whisper passed round that a detachment from our regiment, a fully equipped detachment, had marched out of barracks one morning, had gone somewhere, and had not come back.

This quiet little move, which had actually concerned only one of our companies, had brought to mind a rumour about that railway, concerning which a word has been said in the foregoing chapter. Somebody had been saying a few days before that the construction of that railway would have to be protected, that the line could be built only under cover of pickets as the route crossed the country of a hostile tribe. Might not this account for that little expedition from our regiment? The question seemed to put the mind on the track of probability. But the point lost credit when someone remarked that the direction in which the troops had proceeded when they left the cantonment did not show that their destination was the territory in which the railway builders were at work.

However, the object of the despatch of those forty files that had "gone out somewhere," was a matter that was little talked about. Remarks on the subject did not pass beyond a few words. Perhaps, anyhow, it was only a small affair, perhaps it meant but some temporary duty at a post on the inner Frontier line? Perhaps, whatever it was, that little party of troops would be back again in barracks in two or three days?

Well, the two or three days passed. That detachment had not returned. But its absence stirred no curiosity or talk. Those troops being away and out of sight were out of mind. And we were still thinking of little more than of the hot weather, and of the change from the plain to the good air of the hills, when one night, at a late still hour, when men were in the depth of a barrack sleep, there came a summons that brought the regiment out of its cots.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MARCH

THE summons came an hour after midnight. It was a bugle-call for colour-sergeants, and as this was at first sounded away in a remote part of the lines, the notes were only faintly distinguishable in our bungalow, and were caught only by the ears of those who had not yet fallen asleep.

In our barrack-room a man who heard the distant call, exclaimed "colour-sergeants!" and instantly there was a stirring of other men in their cots. Some murmured, some yawned, and then after a brief moment of silence, one man laughed aloud. Then others laughed, and though the laughter was hollow, it signified that instinct had grasped something that the tongue could not express.

"Colour-sergeants" was a strange call to hear at such a time, an hour after midnight, when it seemed there was not a mouse stirring in the cantonment. If sounded some time during the day, the call might mean no more than that, say, the quartermaster required the signatures of those eight N.C.O.'s to some army form, but its sounding an hour after midnight could not be for such a simple necessity.

Men arose from their cots and peered curiously into the area in front of the bungalow. It was not very dark. There was sufficient light to enable one to see into a good stretch of ground ahead. But no living object could be seen. The lines were deserted, and there was no sign to show that anybody had yet stirred in the other barracks. In the faint light grounds and buildings looked lonesome and ghostly, and the stillness was so deep that a sentry's ear could hear but the faint murmur of a brisk little stream that flowed through the cantonment.

"I wonder if all the 'flags' (colour-sergeants) have heard the call," said one of the men who had just gazed into the area in front of the barrack. He might have saved himself the remark, for the words were no sooner uttered than the

bugler, who had come up the lines and was now near our bungalow, repeated "colour-sergeants" at full blare. Now the warning had gone forth from one end of the lines to the other. Now within barrack limits all ears must have heard the bugler's resounding summons to those wearers of the crowned chevrons.

Without delay, but drowsily and wonderingly, the "flags" answered the call, hurried towards the orderly-room, and there having received instructions, went off at once to communicate them to all other ranks. But not in the fulness with which they were received were those orders communicated. For the quick grasp of the companies, they were condensed to the limit, and when our section commander entered the barrack-room, he explained to us the reason for the bugle-call in two words: "Marching order!"

Enough for the moment, these two words put the barrack-rooms in a bustle. And as they prepared, men obtained more instruction. Little necessities which they were handed out gave them information without words. To carry in his haversack, each man was given a tiny faggot with which to light a fire and cook for himself if need might be, and a little packet of tea, and a little packet of sugar, and a sealed emergency ration, a field dressing and an identity disc.

Now indeed all signs told that a standing plan had come under execution. The doors of mobilization stores were flung open. Unusual supplies were issued. Uncommon army forms were signed. Hurried pen-and-ink work was done in offices. Lights had appeared in the orderly-room, and in the quartermaster's stores. The regimental staff was busy, and fatigue parties were at work. And not in our lines alone was there bustle at this strange hour. Every unit of the brigade was astir. Every unit of the garrison was contributing a detachment to a picked force of all arms which was now being mobilised. Of that force our detachment was the largest in numbers. The call had come for the bulk of our battalion.

The hours of darkness passed. At dawn preparations were still going on. After sunrise transport appeared on the lines. There were the draught mules and the pack mules, and there were the awkward camels that only practised hands could load as they should be loaded. But though things were hastened, and no time seemed to be lost, yet the morning was well advanced when at length the equipped companies of our regiment paraded on a grassy plot near green shady trees, in order that the medical officer might see them, and judge from looks men's fitness for a march.

Now was a time for a little reflection, and while the medical officer was passing up and down the ranks, the thought may have occurred to the experienced that the best hours for marching had passed. The cool of the morning had gone by, and no advantage had been gained by the earliness of the rouse. The troops had been astir since midnight, had lost a night's sleep, and now before the march had started, the sun was gaining strength.

These were considerations of no light account for a regiment that was still fresh to this region. The Gosling Greens had been but a few months in the North West. They had come from Bengal, a country that softened and slackened, and they had not yet become seasoned and toughened by the Frontier climate and by Frontier training.

After the inspection, all being ready, the companies, stared at by roguish-looking Pathans and barrack idlers, moved out of the grassy parade ground, entered the main road, and "at ease," with arms slung, marched away with habitual stride. They advanced along the main highway into the open country, and in an easterly direction. They had turned their backs to the hills and seemed to be going away from the Frontier. But by their going forth in this direction no deception was intended.

The troops were loaded with service kit. Their water-bottles were filled to the neck; their bandoliers were crammed with ammunition, and their haversacks bulged enormously. They wore spine pads and helmet covers for protection against the sun. They carried on their persons light entrenching implements that were experimental, and enamelled drinking mugs that at every pace rattled against the equipment.

This equipment, it was said, spoke for itself. Yet everything was not clear to every mind. A little knowledge had been withheld, and that little left the man in the ranks guessing. The destination had not been declared. Routes and distances had not been mentioned. But when the commander of one company advised some men not to drink water, or "we'll never get there," the men who heard the words reasoned that *there* must mean a long off.

After it had marched about two miles, the detachment of five companies, the leading unit of the mobile column, changed direction. Having reached the limit of the detour, it turned off the trunk road, and thenceforward its route was across a level tract, and along a road bordered by low trees that gave no shade from the sun.

The troops were now facing tribal country, and the distant view was towards an enormous mountain terrain that ex-

tended northward from the verge of the plain into the depths of Central Asia. Ahead now were the mountains that in the year 327 B.C. were traversed by the greatest military leader the world has ever known—great Alexander leading his campaign-hardened host of Greeks to the conquest of the Punjab. Ahead too, in the same region, was a three-headed peak which could be seen from Peshawar. That peak marked the mountain of the wild vine and ivy where the great Macedonian sacrificed to the gods. And far northward of this classic landmark, and visible to the eyes of a soaring eagle, but not to the eyes of man below, were ranges of mighty mountains whose loftiest snowy peaks were thousands of feet higher than Mont Blanc.

Along the trunk road, before it came to the turning point, the detachment had marched regularly and with a rhythmic pace. But after the halt that marked the end of the first fresh hour of marching, that fine pace had ended. Sections were no longer covering, formations had become loose, ranks had opened out, and afflicted by the dust, men sought the sides of the road for freer breathing.

The sun was now strong. Men had become flushed and were perspiring, and for relief the upper buttons of jackets were undone. The heat, the dust, the constriction of accoutrement, and the weight of kit had begun to tell; and as the detachment moved along irregularly, and with each man marching on his own, no words were spoken. It had become a solemn steadfast trudge, and the sounds that were its accompaniment were the jangle of the pack mules' harness, the churning of the drinking water in the vessels called *pakhals*, the creaking of the entrenching tools on the mules' backs, and the rattle of the drinking mugs on the troops' equipment.

And as they went along, men did not look to the right or to the left, or far away into the country that lay before them. The vision of the marchers was downward, and no man gazed ahead towards the great hills, or mused on the contrast, that while yonder, winter prevailed, snow-robed the mountains, and ice-bound the streams, here the sun in its power smote the dusty plain, the wayfarer sought the shade of green trees, and yearned for chill drinks to slake his thirst.

Thus this leading unit of the mobile column, laboured on till it came to a point where a change of scene brought a fact of geography to mind. It had arrived at the Kabul River. The eyes of the marchers were relieved to behold the broad flood of that river that is foreign to India, but native to Afghanistan, and that had entered this plain to receive its last chief tributary, the Swat, and then deliver itself into the Indus. And vast is the volume of waters that

the Kabul brings to that great river—waters of Afghan and Chitral mountains, tributaries from the Sufaid Koh in the south, and from the region in the remote north that extends towards the Pamirs.

Flowing eastward from the capital through the heart of the Afghan country, and swollen by the copious streams received from both banks, the Kabul becomes a broad and expansive river before it reaches the Frontier hills. Then, its direct course to eastward thwarted by the barrier, it turns northward, and pursues its way through a solitude. Here it loses breadth. It is forced into a narrower channel, and in a deep gorge amid wild lonely mountains, where it is Mississippi and greatest river of the earth to the little Mohmand urchins on its banks, the Kabul sweeps along with enormous volume and force in the season of melting snows. Its further windings bring it to the eastern mouth of the gorge where it enters the plain of Peshawar. Then, clear of the hills, the river widens again, and at the point in its course at which this column of troops had arrived, it had branched into two channels across which the road was carried by boat bridges.

Here the Kabul looked as a river might look after it had traversed and drained the Hindu Kush. Signs told that its source and its course were mountainous, and from the touch of a finger you might imagine that the river had borne along meltings yielded from snows and glaciers to its great tributary from northern Chitral—the Kunar. But was the Kabul's water potable? There was good reason to ask that question now that this march had halted, and thirsty troops were at the river-side.

The river here flowed over a sandy bed. The water was cold, though exposed to a strong sun. But it was not clear water. It was cloudy, and it held fine whitish sand in suspension. Yet the taste was good, and if it could be freed from that silvery grit, it would be a grateful draught for parched throats. But for filtering no means were now at hand, and so no *pakhals* were replenished from the waters of that great snow-fed Afghan river.

By the time the column had reached this stage, it was long past midday, and the heat had become intense. The troops were covered with dust, and their khaki jackets were soaked with perspiration which had stained the leather of their equipment. Many had been overcome by the strain. Men of various ranks, from privates to captains, had been forced to lag, or rest for a while by the way, because of the sun, the powerful sun, that was making one mile of this march equal to a league on another march.



Welcome then was this halt near the river. It brought relief to the troops in the shade of wayside trees. The time granted was fifteen minutes, but a little longer rest was needed. So there was a request for five minutes more. The brigadier, to whom the appeal was addressed looked at his watch, hesitated, and then replied: "I can give you three." And the manner in which the brigadier looked and spoke signified that time pressed.

By the time two further stakes had been covered, the sun's power had begun to wane. But that power had already wrought disarray to the pick of a brigade in column of route. It had made laggards and stragglers of many in every unit of this mobile column. It had brought about curious formations on the way. Utmost irregularity prevailed. But what did that matter now? In broken step, and broken ranks, and straggling, the column still progressed. The column still made headway somehow.

And no time could be lost on the way. The brigadier had reason for stinting the minutes for that halt in that shady spot on the Kabul's banks. The day was farther advanced than many had believed. Signs of lateness appeared sooner than expected as progress was made into the country beyond the river. Shadows had lengthened, and soon, as it seemed, the mellowing sunbeams vanished from the plain. The Frontier hills were now looking dim, and those towering range whose summits were visible from the south of the plain, had faded out of view. Sundown brought coolness, but the fatigue of the marched miles was now weighing heavily on limbs, and every furlong of further progress marked credit to staying power.

At length one sign on the way told that the column was approaching the territory whence, it was supposed, the call had come. At a point on the road numbers of Pathans squatted in a line to see the troops go past, and see they did with the keen eyes with which Frontier tribesmen watch the going-past of armed bodies when the talk of *jung* is in the air. The watchers' faces were full of comprehension. Their eyes showed that this march was more than a matter of curiosity to them. They were men of the plain, but their villages were barely out of range of the foothills, and from their looks you might guess that at the moment the thoughts and the talk of those plainsmen were of the hostile doings of hillmen.

Beyond the place where it passed those watching Pathans, the column entered a tract that was close and wooded. It had drawn nearer to the hills, but could not see the country ahead for the trees. Many and of various species were those

trees, and welcome was their shade when the sun was at its strength. But shade was not needed now, for the sun had set, and since that setting those trees had been casting only gloom on the way.

And now indeed it was late. All signs marked the closing of the day. Amid those trees the light soon faded, and dusk came on. Night had overtaken the march. But the destination was near ; the troops were toiling over the last mile, and beyond this grove was the destined camp.

And now that long hot day had ended, now that the powerful sun that smote the marchers on the way had long since vanished beyond the Afghan hills, and night had fallen and stars had appeared, what was the state of that body of infantry that had sallied out of Peshawar in the morning ?

The troops looked ghostly in the darkness, for they were white from head to heel with the dust of the march. The perspiration that had soaked through khaki and stained leather, was now cold. Throats and necks were sunburnt, and eyes and lips were smutted. A few men were limping from sore heels, all men were stiff in the joints, and every face showed the strain of the marched miles under that fiery sun.

But though many had been forced to lag on the way, every man had marched to the limit of his powers, and every man had made the camp. Not one was missing from that whited fatigued detachment, that in the darkness trailed off the road into an enclosed area, where the fresh trenches, and the barbed wire, marked the objective of the move for which the regiment had been roused at midnight.

## CHAPTER XVI

### CHALLENGE

Soon after our arrival in that camp where the march ended at night-fall, we had become well aware of the reason for the despatch of the column. We had been sent out here because a warlike Pathan tribe in the neighbouring hills had risen. For some motive or other a *jehad*, or holy war, had been preached. A tribal force, known as a *lashkar*, had mustered, and roused to action by the tongues of their spiritual leaders, had overrun the line that marked the limits of their territory, had cut telegraph wires, sniped posts and ambushed troops.

Now, having knowledge of these facts, we had reason to expect that our camp would not be left undisturbed during the hours of darkness. Indeed shortly after our arrival, word was passed round that the camp would probably be attacked some time during the night. And what we had been warned of came to pass. The snipers did come. There was a short burst of firing about midnight, but nobody was hit. It was all over in a minute, and the troops who had manned the parapets, withdrew to their tents, and again lay down to sleep away the fatigue of the march.

And now that the snipers had departed, as we supposed, all was peace. The night was still. No sound beyond the hum of insects fell upon the ear, and not a leaf stirred in the green foliage of the trees that grew around the camp. The command of nature to all living things seemed to be : peace ! And the encampment slept till an hour before dawn, when the soundest sleepers were again awakened by rifle-firing. But the firing was in the distance. Another camp which was situated about two miles to the north of ours, was being sniped. We already knew that a camp lay somewhere in that direction, and now its position was shown to us by the flashes from the rifle muzzles. And now too we knew the whereabouts of that detachment from our regiment. We were sure that it lay over there in that advanced camp, and

that its rifles were now hot after a vigorous reply to the snipers.

The following day was a day of heat and swarming flies, and our companies were doing little more than improving camp's parapets to make them more secure against attack. But no attacker came that night. Not a shot was heard during the hours of darkness. The troops had a full night's rest, and in the morning the column packed and marched northward to that advanced camp. There at last we saw the faces of that body of men that "had gone out somewhere and had not come back."

The advanced camp was entirely unlike the camp we had left. Its area was far larger, and it was not on a slope, but on level ground. And, further, whereas that other camp lay off the road, this camp occupied the road, which, consequently, had ceased to be a public thoroughfare, and as a way had become as military as if it were but a passage through a barrack yard.

A parapeted entrenchment enclosed the camp on four sides, and the figure described by the enclosing lines might be called an oblong, or a rectangle, but the army called it a "perimeter," and whether that term was correct or not, it was accepted, and its use passed beyond question.

The camp's length was north to south. The western side of the perimeter was towards the hills, and on the east side the entrenchment extended along the outer edge of the road, which was bordered by trees. This road, the highway from Peshawar, entered the camp at the south face, and passed out at the north face. Thence it led on till, as the map showed, it came to a dead stop at the end of the plain, or at the foot of the hills.

On the north, south, and west sides of the camp, the man-high parapets commanded a clear field of fire, but on the east side there was obstruction. A village in front of the entrenched line masked the camp in that direction. And the change of scene that had been brought about here within a few days must have been viewed with wonder by the little Pathan boys who peeped out of that village. A week before when they looked across, they saw but the trees and the road that goes from the hills to Peshawar. Now when they looked across they beheld a camp of the Sirkar, with its barbed wire, trenches, parapets, felled trees and wilted branches, troops, horses, mules and camels.

And it seemed that, despite all the racket of the *paltan log*, not a bird had forsaken those trees that grew within the camp. For the birds, trees were still trees, camp or no camp; and so the wild dove could be heard, the *mina* could

be seen, and the air resounded with the glee of chirping sparrows. And the sparrows were not always on the trees. Often were they on the ground, where they could be seen pecking at the grain spilled from the feed of the transport animals. And the coppersmith bird, wisest little nest-builder of the woods, spare of song, and not easily seen—he too was a visitor to this camp, where, having found a tree to his fancy, and a shady perch whereon “to beat his little copper pot,” now and again made his *tonk ! tonk ! tonk !* heard above all other warblings.

The camp was within rifle range of the hills, but the range was not effective. The water picket, which was posted a little to the south-west of the perimeter, was a fancied target for the marksmen on the hills, but though spent bullets now and again dropped around the spot where the sentry stood, no casualties resulted from this distant sniping nor from the other long shots that were aimed at the camp itself.

The little force within the perimeter included not only infantry, but a detachment of cavalry, some sappers and miners, and a field gun which was snugly emplaced at the north-west corner of the camp. Anyone looking at that gun might suppose that its bright polished snout was laid on a vital point ; and if the gunner in charge kindly permitted you to have a look through his telescope, you could see that on the ground commanded by this eighteen-pounder, the hill-men were as busy as ants, building stone breasworks or *sangars*, for their riflemen. And there could be no doubt about the object of these preparations.

On our side too men were not idle. The companies of our own regiment became busy soon after they arrived in camp. Pick and shovel work went on. Parapets were strengthened and made more convenient for the rifleman. Every point was made as secure as it could be, and nothing that might favour the approach of an enemy under cover of darkness was overlooked.

To this end the troops worked throughout the afternoon, and here and there men were still working, when about sunset there was passed round a word that prepared the ear and the eye for a little thing that was about to happen. This message came from the field gunner at the corner. He let us know that his gun was about to speak in reply to this sniping from the hills. And that intimation at once took attention away from jobs in hand. The infantrymen stayed their picks and shovels, and in a moment all eyes were turned westward and towards the hills behind which the sun was setting.

At a certain point in that direction, the camp's solitary gun was fired, and fired more than once. Its thunderous reports echoed away among remote gorges and valleys, and in this serene hour of sunset, the flight in steep trajectory of each projectile in a coloured flame was a sight that held the gaze of every eye in camp.

What had been the effect of this gunning we knew not. Perhaps the hillmen had dodged clear of the radius of each shell blast? We stared at the spot where each projectile dropped, but all that a man without a field glass could vaguely discern was the rise of a little dust, and all that could be heard was a low muffled sound like "w-wup!"

The gunner having done what he had been bidden to do, and no more, the gun was left to cool in that snug and secure epaulment. The infantrymen labouring on the parapets finished their jobs, and the entrenching tools were put away. The shadows cast by the foothills had vanished, for the sun had gone down behind the Afghan mountains. The notes of birds sounded fainter among the trees. Twilight came over the camp, and the hour having come to make dispositions for the night, double sentries were posted along the trenches.

The sentries were told what to do, and what not to do, and the instruction given while there was still light, was all very well. But great is the effect of nightfall on a man's mind and vision. The advice to note clearly by daylight the objects in view of your post, so that the eye might not be deceived by them at night—that was all in reason, but it did not help very much after all. Night still brought illusions and things that puzzled. Once darkness set in, all objects on the ground in front became vague and suspicious to the man gazing over the parapet. The sentry of acutest discernment could not then be certain whether some object or other outside the camp was animate or inanimate. And in the circumstances there was the likelihood that under the strain of vigilance, someone might expend ammunition in vain—might fire at an imaginary enemy.

Most of the men of our companies were young, and were fresh to these experiences. From what they had seen and heard their minds had been quickened, and they had an eager anticipation of events. Two nights before this camp had been attacked. Tonight there might be a stronger and more determined attack. Consequently our double sentries became extremely alert, and this alertness and keen suspicion of danger led to a blunder before the night had far advanced.

About an hour after darkness had fallen, a sentry in one section of the perimeter fancied he saw a moving object and

fired at it. Instantly a neighbouring sentry also imagined he saw something that moved, and another shot followed. These two shots alarmed the sentries along the whole trench line, and several more shots were fired into the darkness at supposed hostile objects.

The companies, who were then resting in the trenches, believing that the sentries had not fired without cause, at once arose, and peered into the area outside the parapet. But little could they discern beyond a distance of twenty yards or so. Farther back objects were undistinguishable. But those fresh sentries imagined that thereabouts suspicious forms had moved.

In a moment reason had surrendered to the imagination. The infantrymen thought that the attacker was, or might be, out there crouching in the darkness. The contagion of alarm spread in a flash. The whole length of parapet was manned. Every yard was covered by a rifle. One section started firing and another followed, and instantly rifle fire was rapid and sustained along the whole perimeter. A machine gun section joined in the fusillade. The field gun at the corner was again fired, and woke a thunderous echo away in the darkness of the frontier hills. Birds flew out of the trees with cries of alarm. Every animal in camp was scared. Mules neighed and camels growled, and in a wild stampede, horses rushing blindly in the darkness came in conflict with the barbed wire and were lacerated.

The firing ceased within two minutes, but these were astounding minutes. The camp had gone mad, and it had gone mad without any cause. Nobody had attempted to attack us, and nobody had sniped. No enemy had approached the perimeter. No hostile movement had there been anywhere in the vicinity, and nothing had occurred that might excuse the firing. So, plainly, a good deal of ammunition had been wasted.

This was a blunder that could not be let pass without censure. Indeed before the firing had stopped, the loud and angry voice of authority could be heard. The brigadier had spoken, and we apprehended from his tones that what had happened would have to be accounted for to the commander of the division who was in a camp two miles away. To him the cause of that great burst of musketry, that thundering gun report, and that wild stampede of the horses would have to be explained.

And sure enough what we had feared came to pass. The brigadier told the whole story to his superior, and great was the wrath of the G.O.C. when he heard it. His reprimand was severe. It was communicated to our C.O. On the

following morning, assembled for the purpose, we listened to words that wounded, and when the censure had been delivered, and the parade broke off, the regiment felt as one man. What had been heard had left dejection on the face of everyone who wore the crest of the Gosling Greens.

However, the wound inflicted on the spirit of the regiment soon healed, and the anger of the command too cooled. Perhaps the general may have regretted that his rebuke had been expressed with such severity? But, anyhow the matter soon passed out of mind, and all that day the little composite force within the camp went on with its various duties as if it had no knowledge of that unfortunate incident. Pickets were posted and pickets relieved. There was further sniping from the hills, and light reconnaissances were pushed afield. A troop of cavalry, to whom commands came by whistle, more than once went forth and came back, but we knew not with what results. And meanwhile the infantrymen's light military navying went on. More material was excavated from the bed of the trenches and clapped on the parapets, and better rests and loopholes were made for rifles.

At length, towards the close of a long hot day, when the sun had set, and all good men of the Prophet's faith had turned to Mecca and knelt and prayed, and when a calm and mellow twilight had come over the camp, we looked towards the west and saw that bonfires blazed high up on the hills, where probably the tribal *lashkar* would bivouac that night. And those who knew best said that the lighting of those fires signified challenge and a showing of fight.

At nightfall the orders that were read out to us in the trenches hinted that the following day would not pass off as the day that had just ended. In brief we were notified that reveille would be very early and that half an hour later, a column, which would include four companies of our regiment, and which would be fully equipped, would be ready to move out of camp.

Information stopped short at that. And not a syllable of his own did the sergeant add to throw light on the words he had read. His lips closed as he closed his notebook, and going away he left our minds to guessing. And so wondering what little adventure or other the next day might bring us, we lay down for a bivouac sleep on the bed of the dusty trenches.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE AFFAIR AT SUNRISE

WE were roused soon after dawn when the air was fresh and cool, and when our nearest neighbours, the birds, had but just begun to chirp on the green trees that branched high above our trenches. But no time had our minds then to dwell upon the pleasantness of that dawning hour, its sweet scents, and the early cheer of the birds. Our thoughts were of the parade and its purpose. What might this business ahead be? Would it be finished by midday, or would it last till sunset? We wondered.

Rough and hurried was our preparation for that parade. But things that mattered in barracks did not matter here. The inspection was but a glance. Little was our company commander concerned that morning whether we had used razor, comb, brush, or polishing cloth. Were our four sections all present, were as all equipped and ammunitioned as we should be, was our transport in order?—that was all our captain seemed to care about now.

Soon we were ready, and with our stretcher-bearers beside us, and the jingling mules at our heels bearing entrenching implements, water and ammunition, we moved off with the other companies, and headed towards the perimeter's northern outlet. But short was the march. The column had not gone half a mile beyond the camp when the command came to halt. The brigadier approached. There was a call for officers and all chevroned ranks. Orders were explained, and the plan unfolded.

But the conference was brief, and when the section commanders rejoined us, we learnt that the gist of the brigadier's instructions came to one word: "Attack!" The challenging tribesmen on the hills had crossed the line that demarcates. They must be driven out of their advanced positions and forced back into their own territory.

For this operation the force selected by the command was deemed adequate. It was a composite column. It was made up of detachments drawn from seven units, and it represented three arms of the service—the rifle, the field gun, and the lance. None of the detachments was strong in numbers. Ours was the strongest, but it numbered only 300 out of a battalion, and the whole column amounted to only 1,250 men. But if this could not be called a large force, it could be called the pick of the Peshawar brigade.

Of the strength of the hillmen's muster, no estimate had been given out. That matter was open to guessing, and our guess put the numbers of the enemy contingent far above our own total. But most of us were then unaware that the whole of the hostile tribal force was not arrayed against us on this front. Only in the afternoon did we learn that in the valley behind those hills another part of the *lashkar* was engaged against another column of the Frontier forces.

The tribesmen were said to be armed mostly with Le Metford and Martini-Henry rifles, and these they fired from behind those stone breastworks called *sangars*. The attack on their positions must be delivered across an expanse of open ground that stretched from the road to the foot of the hills. They may have to yield under this attack, but they are secured by the terrain. Sheltered by the hill shoulders, they can fall back through gorges and defiles. And it may not be prudent to follow them up, to press forward on the heels of their retirement. Pursuit thus might lead the pursuer into difficulties. And anyhow there was yet no sanction for military action beyond the limits of tribal territory. No, what was now in view, it seemed, was a punitive thrust at the tribesmen. They had, as said, to be dislodged from the ground upon which they had encroached. They had to be beaten back behind the line they had overrun.

Having outlined the plan, and the method by which it was to be executed, the brigadier rode away. The command "move!" was given. The companies deployed, and facing the hills, extended into skirmishing lines as they might do on a field day, or in the practice of some little tactical scheme within sight of barracks. The extended sections lay down. Distances to points on the foothills were reckoned. The first shots were fired by the troops, and answering shots came from the *sangars*. The action has opened. From the plain all eyes are on the hills at which more than the troops are now staring. All the Pathans of the village that gave its name to the camp are out on the roadside watching like scouts. Young and old are there, and little boys have

climbed trees and their view over hill and plain is as the eagle's.

To the minds of those urchins thus gazing over the whole field of action, those few skirmishing sections may have seemed but a meagre force to deliver this attack, and being sons of Pathans, they may have been fancying the hillmen's chances of putting up a good fight, and pinking their khaki adversary. And never perhaps did the thought strike those little watchers on the trees that in this morning's affair, the attackers were to the attacked as the Romans were to the barbarians.

True, the enemy were vague targets. They were favoured by the hues of their dress that matched the background. Hills and hillmen were in colour alike. A Pathan standing motionless on a height beyond a valley is no bold object, and when he lies down he becomes invisible. But the lashkar had not all the advantage in that way. The troops on the plain were also chameleons to their surroundings. Khaki in tone with the face of the land was a screen for its wearers. And so poor marks were the scattered figures in the skirmishing lines for the best shots behind the sangars. When a section arose and doubled forward now and again, its men were not easily marked; when a section lay prone in the open, its men vanished as targets.

At the moment when the action opened, and for some time after they had advanced some distance in the direction of the hills, the attention of the men of our companies was so fixed on the objective, that it might appear as if they alone had to execute the command's plan. But after a little while they could not fail to notice that various other troops also had begun to take a part in this affair. More small units of infantry from other regiments had moved up and had come into the attacking line. Far away on our flank to the left, a detachment of lancer cavalry was watching the hills; and on our right, and a little to rearward, a section of a field battery had cantered up, and without a moment's delay had come into action.

And those gunners having begun their work, for a little while distracted the infantry. Their gunning was a great *tamasha*. How could a man keep looking along the sights of a rifle, and staring at blurred objects away on the hill slopes while a projectile was roaring through the morning air in a curve described by a rainbow coloured flame! Indeed not a rifleman from one of the line to the other could have been attentive to his target from the moment a shell left a gun muzzle till it dropped somewhere on the slopes with that dull "w-up"! And what a scene was all this for the little

Pathan boys on those trees ! They indeed were having the sight of their lives. They were now seeing things that their memories would hold fresh till they became greybeards.

The skirmishing lines with great intervals between units, stretch out to a wider front. By alternate advances of sections, ground is gained afield by the infantry, and again and again the field guns drop shells at one point or another on the ridges. Fresh and lively experience this for the "topes," as the infantry call them ! But those field gunners may have no further occasion for such practice, for if later into the hills we go, this battery cannot accompany us. Instead there will go with us the mountain or pack battery, whose gunners are strong fellows and nimbly handle those pieces that can be borne on mules' backs over steep places.

With an action like this begun, and men's minds held fast to one purpose, the morning hour was soon consumed. The air had now lost its freshness. The hot day was upon us, and on the horizon was that haze that veils remote mountains in mystery. The sun shone at its full power for the hour and the season, and its rays had made animate nature active and vocal. Doves were cooing in distant green trees. Flies swarmed, cicadas hummed, and lizards, wiry and agile, raced along rocks. Exposed to sun and glare, the parched sterile ground was hot again ; and the troops who lay on that ground, and who were wearing spine pads and helmet shades, were already flushed, and their rifles were burning hot from continuous firing. Barrels were sweating, and jelly, melted by the heat of repeated discharges, had oozed from the recesses of weapons.

And how is the other side faring ?—how goes it with the hillsiders ? As far as can be seen they are combating with fine spirit and boldness. They are resisting the Sirkar's superior power with might and main. They are fighting with all the recklessness and fervid valour of the jihad, and though their arms are not as good as ours, we have reason to know that they are effective enough at certain ranges.

Those weapons, we are told, are of various makes, and have been procured somehow or other from various sources. We suspect that this tribe being of Afghan faith and blood, had secured arms from the arsenal at Kabul ; and we believe that they have also in their hands some rifles that have been smuggled all the way from the Persian Gulf, and that bear the marks of an arsenal in Central Europe. And there was the likelihood too that some members of this tribe had had dealings at a certain place down the Frontier where Pathan artificers make and sell bundooks, which, though not as good as those that come from the Sirkar's workshops could still kill a man.

And besides their bundook men they have some men of the short curved sword for close-quarter fighting. Such men of the blade are the *ghazis*, fanatic warriors of the *jehad*, eager seekers of that chance for wild onslaught in which they court the death that in their faith means paradise.

There are fighters of various ages behind those rude stone shelters, but whether youths or greybeards, they are brave, and they are men of vigour and tough build. Their wild life in those hills has made them so. But they are untaught and untrained, and they are doing today what their fathers and their fathers' fathers had been doing for two generations—rising now and again and contending with a power that is certain sooner or later to prevail and quell their insurgence.

And if you were to suggest that they might be delivered from this condition, say, by building roads and railways through their wild country, you might draw from some considerate head an opinion that might be expressed in words to this effect: "Just so; build roads or railways if you can, and bring those tribesmen to better ways if possible. Win them to your side if you can; but whatever you do attempt to bring about no great migration. Leave the hillmen to the hills that have made them strapping men, given them courage and straight forward speech. Let them be as they are, dwellers in the wild pure air of those mountain borderlands away from the bazars and the bazar peoples, and remote from the low-lying region between the Himalayas and the sea where strong races must not settle lest they perish.

So far as the building of railways was concerned, it was beyond all doubt that the very idea of such enterprise was repugnant to this tribe and to their kinsfolk the Afghans, and to the Amir of the Afghans. By all these peoples railways were suspected to be instruments designed to sap their independence and lay them open to easy conquest. Indeed this very tribe was known to be tooth and nail against the building of that railway of which we have spoken; and it was believed that in their opposition to this project, they had been patted on the back by emissaries from the Afghan side.

But now to return to this action. The fire from the plain at length made the *sangar* line untenable. The tribesmen began to yield. The musketry at shorter range had told. The sparse lines of skirmishers had drawn close to the foothills, and on the left a flanking movement had begun to tell, two companies of an English Shire regiment having pressed an attack along a ridge on the right of the position occupied by the tribesmen.

Thus exposed now to more effective fire from the front, and threatened by this lateral attack, the tribesmen had

begun to withdraw from the shelter of the breast-works. But they did so without precipitancy. They gave ground in the manner of men of dogged spirit no longer able to withstand the blows of a mightier arm.

When eventually all sections of the skirmishing lines had reached the rising ground, and when some were close to the *sangars* that had been quitted by the enemy, the column's progress was halted by the order from the command to cease fire. This signified that the advance had been pushed as far ahead as discretion sanctioned. The column might now press further onward, but to do so would be to do that which the enemy might wish that it would do. The tribesmen could be driven farther and farther back, and forced to quit position after position; but it was plain that while yielding ground in this way, they would be drawing the troops into the hills, and that the farther the troops went ahead the greater would be the difficulties for their retirement.

The "cease fire!" brought calm over the whole field of hostilities. Everything came to rest. Hills and plain were hushed. Not a shot echoed anywhere, for curiosity it so happened that when the troops' fire ceased, the hillmen's ceased at the same time. And the hillmen now were not all under cover. Many a skull-capped fighter could be observed boldly standing on the skyline and gazing with eagle vision down upon the slopes and ridges where the scattered sections of the khaki force lay resting on that ground that in tone blended so very well with their dress.

In this interval of quiet a message was signalled by the commander. It was but one word, and that was in praise of the troops. The plan so far had been executed to satisfaction. And signs now told that our own detachment had been closely engaged. For field dressings there had been need. Stretchers had carried burthens to the rear, and in one company a private had won a D.C.M., and a subaltern a D.S.O. But our task was now but half done, and the half that remained was certain to be the more difficult, for now we had to retire. The enemy knew that very well. To the brain of the Pathan guerillist, the position was now as clear as daylight. The hillmen saw that we must turn tail and they were eagerly awaiting the moment.

In a few minutes the lull ended. An order to retire was signalled and then the lashkar saw that their chance had come. The tribesmen issued from the shelter which the projection of the hills had afforded them, and soon all their bundooks were cracking at the troops that were getting away as best they could from the high ground, section covering section in turn. By this process which long training had

made a habit, the companies got clear away from the high ground, faced about, lay down, and resumed the firing from positions where they were no longer at a disadvantage.

But other troops were still upon the high ground. There were the two companies who had carried out that little turning movement. They had outflanked the sangar line, and then after those few moments of pause and lull under "cease fire," they too had to turn and withdraw. But they could not get down at once into open ground as we had done. The open ground from which they had ascended the heights was a long way off, and they had to get back by the way they had come.

Although they were of the brigadier's twelve hundred and fifty, those two companies were a little unit apart from us, and acting, in a way, independently. They were not of our camp. Their perimetered bivouacs were at some place lower down the line of communications, and their approach to the scene of this action had been along a ridge, and by that ridge they had now to retire. And they had to do so with skill and warily, for the tribesmen pressed as if eager to get hand to hand with them. The enemy indeed had rushed ahead with such eagerness that they had recklessly changed front and thereby exposed their flank to the fire from the units of the column that had got down to the plain.

By the turn of the action, the men of that Midland regiment had now come to be engaged in the manner of a rear-guard. And praiseworthily was that little body of infantry playing the part. For a company, a battalion, a brigade, extricating itself from the hills under guerillist pressure, there is a fine test of wits. And this was the test in a way to which those two companies were now subjected. The spur of emergency had brought their training and tactical sagacity to trial and they prove themselves. They were acting as if those two captains, two subalterns, two "flags," and a hundred files, had to a man learnt by heart the book of "The Battalion on the Frontier."

Steadily and coolly, the little unit withdrew, stopping now and again in turns, section covering section, to check and resist the pursuer by their fire. But in these circumstances it might so happen that some men might hold on too long by a trifle of time in one place or another, and thus risk in the flash of an instant being overpowered by *ghazis* seeking the close quarter chance for the blade. And in fact there did come a moment when it seemed those Midlanders on the ridge might be too pressed to repel the pursuer and free themselves for withdrawal.

This danger was at once seen by our detachment and by the gunners on our right. Fire was switched on to the threatened position, and the effect was as if a weaponed arm had been stretched forth and had struck at a striking hand. The fanatics were checked. But they were not daunted. They still strove forward impetuously as if eager to get within blade reach of the British infantrymen. They were still combating with fanatic intensity.

But all this tribal valour was in vain. It was but as a wave striking against a rock. It was futile against the practised lessons of the training manuals, against those newest rifles and their skilled users, and against those eighteen-pounders and the gunners. It could not overcome the Sirkar's arms and men. It could not prevail against the pick of the Peshawar brigade.

At last, when it was past mid-day, and the sun was strong and its glare intense, when the troops had reddened and sweated, and the steel parts of their rifles were scorching to the touch, all signs showed that this duel between hill and plain had begun to flag. That timely fire from the troops had enabled men of that shire regiment to get clear of the difficult ground, and soon afterwards the hillmen's fire slackened. The lashkar's effort was spent. Energies were exhausted, and bold fighters had fallen. They had dared far ahead, but they had now reached a point at which they hesitated. Discretion now restrained. Should they press further and venture into more open ground, they might draw upon them the cavalry that watched and waited down below. Sight of the *risala* indeed was a deterrent to those hill fighters. Brave as brave might be to the bullet and projectile, they were fearful of the lance.

Meanwhile the reserves in that camp down below are acutely observing all that is happening on the ridge and on the low ground, and those Pathan villagers were still over there on the roadside, still watching, and commenting on the turns of the *larai*. And the eyes of all the troops in camp and Pathans on the roadside and on the trees, were on the action alone. The country around, the setting of the action was disregarded. But picturesque was that setting—the green foothills, the towering heights behind, and in the hazy distance, lofty bluish ranges that stretched away towards the mighty mountains of the Hindu Kush. With all this grand scenery in view, well might the mind reflect on the littleness of this morning's action. Sight of the enormous mountains and snowy regions in the distance might indeed make this afternoon's affair as trivial as the combat of midgets.

And such as it is, this combat is now played out. The fiery energy of the *jehad* is spent. The hillmen appear to have



had enough fighting for the day. The firing slackens, becomes desultory, and finally ceases. The duel to which the hills have been echoing since morning comes to an end.

And how now might the result of the day's operations be summed up? For a docket-like entry in a notebook it might be recorded that our small picked column of twelve hundred and fifty had advanced across an open tract, attacked a sangared position on the foothills, forced the tribesmen to abandon that position and fall back. Then, after a halt and a pause, the column under fire from the rallied tribesmen, retired, and finally drew off after sustaining seventy casualties.

So then those operations had not been decisive. The action had not altered the position to our advantage. The hillmen were still over the line. In fact they were now standing on ground in advance of that which they occupied in the morning, and being Pathans, they were in all likelihood boasting to themselves that they had not only withstood the attack of the Sirkar's force, but had repelled that attack, and had even pressed the withdrawal of one wing of the column.

So there was some reason to wonder now whether after all this engagement had been only a vain show of force on the Sirkar's side. But perhaps this was deemed to be only a test action, or an opening fencing encounter to ascertain the strength and skill of the hillmen's arm? Perhaps the command, guided by the experience of today, would plan bigger operations for tomorrow when a stronger column would strike with more decisive effect?

But today's work is done at all events, and now the order is "close"! The scattered sections are called in. There is a roll-call. Such casualties as there have been are recorded, and then the companies with arms slung, and mess-tins and drinking mugs jangling on accoutrement, headed for camp.

Flushed and sunburnt were those companies, and there were helmets atilt, and khaki jackets stained by the squirts of melted rifle jelly. Hands and knees showed scratches and bruises from contact with ground that in places was bare, hard and gritty; and those rifles were still hot, and their barrels were fouled as never they had been fouled before.

And after those men of Ours had returned to that camp of the wide trenches, and the high parapets, no longer was it a hot day. The weather had altered and the change was sudden. The sky darkened, the temperature fell, the torment of the flies ceased, and birds made a clamour in the trees. A wind arose, gathered force, and soon we were in the midst of one of those blinding darkening sandstorms that at this

season sweep across the Punjab and the North West Frontier.

And a little later in that dark and windy afternoon, as we looked around, we saw how the morning's experience had called for fatigues that come not to men in barracks, but to men in a camp where there is a countersign and troops' haversacks hold emergency rations.

At a chosen spot within the perimeter, men from a company of Ours had been labouring with pick and shovel, and when their task was finished, there followed the internment of those lads who had fallen during the attack on the foothills. Troops in the rough rig of the service camp, a crowd of unshaven men with eyes and lips smutted, stand around the graves. And while the entrenching implements are at work, the trees are swayed and rustled by the strong, dust-raising wind. The sparrows make a great clamour. The minas of yellow bill utter querulous notes. The mules neigh and stamp, and strange guttural murmurs are heard among the camels; and the breeze among the trees sounds like a wail to that little gathering that silently and solemnly watches the action of the shovels.

No wreaths here, and men knew that no sculptured marble or chiselled stone would ever commemorate. But not long after those shovels had done the work, and the khaki gathering had vanished from the spot, the little oblong mounds, reverently shaped and smoothed, had become sprayed with a layer of fine dust, and this a person of poetic spirit might say was a memorial tribute from the winds.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MORNING AFTER

WHEN the hills were observed in the evening the affair recounted in the last chapter, no sign of a hostile movement could be perceived. And sniping had ceased. Not a shot was heard anywhere. The hills were silent, and in those places where bonfires had blazed the evening before, not a light was to be seen.

At dusk we gave keen ear to the reading of orders for the next day. We were informed that the parade would again be at an early hour, that we would again be fully equipped, and that there was to be a reconnaissance in force in the foothills that overlooked the "Valley of the Turbid Stream."

That night our bivouac sleep was sound, and we thought it was sweetest at the hour when it was broken by the rouse. And fresh and cool was that hour when the air was scented by vegetation. But once on our feet, and having got rid of the dust that ever plagued us in these trenches, we were soon dressed and equipped as we had been in the previous morning. But when we moved off we headed in a direction contrary to that in which we had gone the day before.

Clear of the camp, we moved out towards the ridges, and gradually ascended the lower slopes. But our advance was not challenged. Not a shot was fired anywhere. There was not a trace of a sniper, and the heights all round looked bleak and deserted. It appeared as if the tribesmen had vanished. But a reconnaissance was a reconnaissance. The column moved forward warily, and at intervals there were long halts during which the troops lay down, while the scouts crept farther and farther ahead. And the messages that came back confirmed the belief that the enemy had withdrawn. The lashkar had probably disembodied for the time being, and the tribesmen had gone back to their villages far away in the hills.

The scouts were now treading ground upon which yesterday's affair had left its marks. They were on those ridges where stubborn resistance must have cost the tribesmen many casualties. Reports said that they had been disheartened by their losses, and that when darkness fell, those heights on which fires had flamed the night before had become a prowling ground for jackal and hyena.

And what a change had come over those heights since yesterday's noon! Today no trace of hostile man; today no echo of a shot, nor sound of human voice in those places where yesterday the rattle of musketry was heard for hours, where projectiles burst, where the fanatic's broad blade flashed in the sun, and banner-bearers fell. Over there were those rude sangars that sheltered the lashkar's firing line. There were those boulders upon which the bearded marksmen rested their bundooks to aim at vague khaki figures down on the plain. Here and there might be seen a dented stone, a slight displacement of barren soil, a little broken twig and withering leaves from a stunted wild shrub that yields sweet odours when crushed; and at some spots were dark stainings around which flies still hovered. Such were the evidences of an action that had not yet a history of twenty-four hours.

While the scouts were still ahead, the staff were making use of their field glasses, and the troops lay about in groups and awaited the next move. And this waiting was not under strong sun, for the weather was not as it had been the day before. It was a duller and cooler day, and a light fresh breeze was blowing across the valley.

Down in the plain the road that led to the camp could be traced by a drifting cloud of dust. Away in the area where the attack opened yesterday could be seen a section of a field battery wheel into position and unlimber, and we could see that, as if in anticipation of action, the gunners repeated what they had done the day before on the same ground. They did everything as if the enemy were still occupying the same position. The guns were pointed in the same direction and ranges were taken to certain points. But no vital targets were there. The sangars were deserted. No human form was discernible on the foot-hills; nothing was there but stone, and scrub and sterility, silent and deserted.

Assured beyond all doubt that the enemy had quitted those hills, our reconnoitring column at length withdrew from the ridges that overlooked that bleak valley and came back to camp. And now from the information that the morning had brought us, we were sure that the action of the previous day had not been in vain. We were convinced that the engagement had achieved what the command had intended. From

all accounts the tribesmen had been hit hard. It was stated that having suffered heavily and having abandoned positions that were within gun range of our camp, they had gone back into the recesses of the hills and were now far beyond the reach of the Sirkar's striking arm.

So the G.O.C. was pleased. He uttered words in praise of the troops ; and looks and tones showed how in heart he had changed towards our own regiment. That foolish burst of firing that disgraced us two nights before, was now forgiven. Two days ago the general frowned on us. Now he smiled on us. He beamed on our men when he met them, and addressed them in a manner that touched the heart of a private ; and as he rode through the camp he openly praised our companies when he observed their industry with entrenching implements in the labours of strengthening the parapets.

We were now sure, so commendable had been our conduct within the last day or two, that not only had we been restored to grace, but that we were among units highest in the favour of the command. We felt like a schoolboy who, after default and reprimand, had, by demonstrated ability, been advanced to the head of the class ; and though we were not so vain as to believe that the sun of favour would continue to shine upon us, we had now, at any rate, a stronger faith in ourselves. Animated by praise, we were now more confident of keeping our name in lustre by merit ; and in those further operations in the hills, we hoped that our conduct might not be unworthy of further commendation from the chief of the field force.

And now " the hills " were words that were on everybody's tongue, and they denoted expectations of a lively campaign. It might be within two or three days, but the move must come. We were bound, we thought, to advance into the defiles that stretched away into that northward mountain territory, unless the tribesmen called for truce and sent in their headmen to make terms. And as things were now, they might consider it wise to do so.

After all those little patches of tillage among the hills were of vital account. Some of the crops that were now flourishing might be damaged or destroyed if a punitive force entered the country. And the measure of the tribe's resistance to the Sirkar, would be the measure of the penalty which they would have to pay in fines and hostages. So now if the ardour of the jehad had cooled, the voice of discretion might be heard. Now was the time for the councils of the greybeards to decide and say whether there must be *jung* or no *jung*.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CAMP BY THE MULBERRY TREES

A SPELL without event followed, and the days were days of heat and swarming flies, and sandstorms that again and again blinded and darkened the camp. It was a time when the words "an issue of beer" fell pleasantly upon the ear, and veterans who had campaigned in South Africa, relished the tot of rum that was served in the evening. To those medalled seniors the beverage brought back memories of the veldt, of blockhouses and outpost affairs with Boer commandoes.

And now all was uncertainty. We did not know how things stood. We were in the dark about future moves. Not yet was it known when the advance would begin, and we were not even yet sure that there would be any advance. The despatch of a punitive force into the hills might, or might not be authorised; and this was a matter upon which the last word did not rest with the Government of India, great though its powers were. Simla might propose, but it was for London to decide.

Meanwhile our little force was gaining in strength. Detachments of fresh troops joined us, and eventually we had with us units of nearly every branch of the service. We had infantry, cavalry, field gunners, mountain gunners, sappers and miners, supply and transport corps, and ambulance units. Then there were beside us, or hovering in the background, those odds and ends not serving in the ranks, but obtaining a livelihood from the army by auxiliary service, or by craft or trade.

There were the scavengers and water-carriers who were true to their salt, who followed the troops, served them wheresoever they went, and bore the roughest experiences. And besides the contractors there were the barbers, the chiropodists, and the hawkers of eatables—those men who

trail British troops wherever they go, and who at census-taking declare their caste to be "follower of a White Regiment." And there were too those strange-looking men mounted bareback on little slim country ponies, keeping aloof from the troops and yet always to be seen on the track of mobilized forces—the foragers. These traffickers in provender are the people whose eyes brighten at the report of an expedition on the North West Frontier.

By and by the camp became full of rumours, and bits and scraps of unauthenticated news. Mobilization, they said, was extending. Units of the Rawalpindi division were already in Peshawar; there were stirrings in Lahore, and the ears of commands farther away were expectant. There was talk of restlessness among other tribes, including one whose brigand eyes watched the Khyber caravans go to and fro; and for much, if not for all of this trouble, a secret and powerful instigator was suspected. But whether a strong unseen hand was working or not, there could be no doubt that a rising of several tribes at the same time would be embarrassing for the Sirkar. A widespread "flare-up" on the North West Frontier, as a contingency, had been talked about many a time. Should it ever come to pass, no doubt the call to service would bring a big army across the Indus.

Eventually there came about changes in the disposition of the force that occupied camps in this part of the Frontier. There were moves hither and thither for brigading; and so it happened that an order came for our battalion to pack and march to another camp. This we did not like. We would have preferred to stay on, until the final move came, in those bivouacs beneath the trees where we had constructed trenches and parapets that were models for a frontier perimeter.

The place to which we were ordered to move was only two miles away, but it was lower down the line of communications. Going there seemed like going into the background after having occupied that advanced camp, which, though only two miles away, was by that distance nearer the territory that promised campaign and adventure. This was the thought that might be read on faces on the day we moved out. Our men did not look cheerful, though at the back of their minds there may have been the hope that all would be well by and by, and, that anyhow, within a few days, probably, we would be going with the rest of the field force into the hills.

Arrived at the designated ground, where no sod had yet been turned, the companies forthwith laid hand to pick and shovel. On traced lines, trenches were excavated, and parapets built, and soon we had again made for ourselves a

"perimeter camp." And when the long hot day drew to a close, and the shadows of the hills were again on the plain, we might say, as we looked around, that after all we had not come to a bad place, and that the ground served very well for a temporary encampment.

Our camp was on level ground in an open area. It was situated on the north side of a road that led westward from the main highway towards the hills of the Afghan border. Though close to the sterile heights, this was a fertile tract. Vegetation proved the soil. Here was land for crop and garden, and not far away was an irrigating stream that flowed with a brisk current and a purl as it hurried on to deliver its little tribute to the great Kabul river.

We were here close to a wooded area. Roads in the vicinity of the camp were bordered by trees of various kinds, and these included the mulberry. There were indeed many trees of that species. In fact the neighbourhood was noted for its mulberry trees, the fruit of which, as we were well reminded, was not at all fit for eating—a circumstance that is probably well remembered by many men to this day.

The place from which the drinking water was obtained was on the far side of the road that led by the camp. The source was not a pure chill spring, nor was it a bright stream that flowed fast over a white sandy bed. No; the water that was filled into *pakhals* and fetched to the camp on the backs of mules came from a pond in the bed of a straggling water-course; and though this was clear to the eye, and apparently potable, it should have been boiled before a drop of it touched a man's lips. But boiled this water was not at first.

There were within this camping area, besides our own regiment, some other units of the field force, including another British infantry regiment that had marched from Peshawar, and had not been here long before our arrival. This regiment, which was encamped a little to the west of our perimeter, and like ourselves, was looking forward to "the hills," had drunk some of that water that had not been boiled, and the consequence was a great calamity. For three days hands in that regiment were digging graves and burying men. And no man among the diggers was certain that a grave for himself would not be dug next day, or the day after, for cholera had broken out, cholera had struck at the regiment. And though men went about with the calm looks of stoics, the thought of the deadly epidemic could not be dispelled from minds, and a cloud of gloom hung over the camp.

Had our own regiment escaped? It seemed so. But still ill-luck came to us. It happened about this time that one of our own men was taken suddenly ill, and died, having been



poisoned, as we believed, by eating "tinned fish." This casualty alarmed the medical mind. It was regarded as a suspicious case. Perhaps it was cholera? The fear that it might be so was bred by circumstance. Cholera was almost in our midst, and it had already slain over two score men within the next perimeter. Consequently the P.M.O. would take no risks. He adopted the safe course. He decided without hesitation, and in effect his decision for us was: In this camp you shall stay till doubt be past. And thus was our regiment quarantined.

In the meantime as the lashkar had not yet dispersed, and the hostile tribe had not yet submitted, the despatch of a punitive expedition was sanctioned. Orders came for the advance of the field force into the hills. But there was no advance for us. Another regiment had moved up and taken our place in the brigade, and seeing this come about, we could not but reflect that our misfortune was that other regiment's luck. However, we had to make the best of a bad matter. There was no help for what had happened, and the decision of the P.M.O. was irrevocable. It was beyond countermand. No power could now annul that *hukm*.

Thus did it come to pass that from one's death, or as somebody said, "on account of a tin of bad fish," we were barred as peremptorily from further operations with the field force as that cholera-stricken regiment.

However, our stroke of ill-luck was nothing like the misfortune of our neighbours. We had cause for regret; they had cause for mourning. Indeed we could not but feel sympathy for that regiment that had seen here so many of its men stricken down in the vigour of youth. The tragic loss was borne with fine fortitude, but the sadness that it left did not soon pass away, and the occasion inspired an elegy from a regimental poet. A few verses that some time later appeared in a military journal in England, and that were reprinted in a pamphlet published in Rawalpindi, paid tribute to the dead.

The composition was the work of a man in the ranks, and it was commendable. It was perhaps as good a piece of work in its theme as might be expected from any spirited man, who, with pen and ink before him on the lid of a kit box, would sit down on his cot to express sentiment in rhyme and rhythm. In four verses and sixteen lines, this barrack poet delivered the regiment's dirge. The lines may not have exhibited high talent in verse-making, but they were apt. They were not great, but they were appropriate, and carried the burthen of the regimental lament with dignity. Recited anywhere, the verses would be heard with rapt ears and emotion, for they brought to mind, as no words in other form

could, the story of those forty-six men who were interred in their khaki in a wild lonesome spot under the shadow of the Frontier hills.

For the rest of the time in this luckless camp, though quarantined, we were still playing the role of a unit on the lines of communication. During the long hot days there was still much handling of entrenching tools, much trench-digging and securing of parapets. Within the perimeter we had still our sentries at every point where they should be, and at a place in the foothills beyond the camp we used to post a picket after sunset and withdraw it at dawn. That was a detached post at a very lonely spot. It was our sole outpost, and it seemed to be the farthest point outside the camp to which our service could now extend.

And day by day we were now seeing one thing or another that reminded us of the experiences from which we were now excluded by quarantine. Here and there we could observe troops or transport heading towards the valley that led into the region of the hostile tribe; and when by and by there came from that direction thunderous reports, we supposed that these were caused by the road-building pioneers blasting a way for transport through the difficult defiles.

After another day or two, reports from the direction of that northern valley became fainter, and then were heard no more. From this circumstance we had reason to think that the field force had by this time made good progress into that wild territory that had bred that hostile *lashkar*. And as no further case of suspicious illness had been reported from our regiment, we now expected to be soon released from quarantine, and sent away from this camp, the dust of which we longed to shake from our boots.

Indeed we had not long to wait for that move to which we were looking forward. Within a day or two came the order for decampment. The regiment was commanded to return to Peshawar.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE MIDNIGHT RETURN

THE heat of the day was over, and it was past sunset, when we paraded for the march to Peshawar. And we were dressed and accoutred in the same manner as we had been when we left that station the month before. Our bulging haversacks were carrying back the same things, one or two of which we had found of no use; and our water-bottles were filled to the neck, though we knew from experience that we would drink little water on the way.

We were eager for this march. We had been looking forward to it as a relief. Anticipation of the change had raised our spirits. We were gladdened by the thought that we were at last leaving the place of the suspect mulberry trees, the tainted water, and the cholera camp. This move would be good for mind and body. We felt as if we needed a march to stretch our legs after those weeks of camp life. And how much better marching by night than marching by day? How much better marching under moonlight than under the fiery rays of the sun?

But, for all that, it was no cool march. Indeed after we had gone a couple of miles we found that dusk had brought not coolness but sultriness, for there was radiation. Little beads of moisture appeared on brows, and soon men were undoing the upper buttons of their khaki jackets, and relieving their heads by taking off their topees, and slinging them on their rifles.

For some time after the start, it was a spirited march, and the pace was the brisk pace of fresh energy. The marchers whistled, or sang snatches of song in chorus till we reached the boat bridges, and there beheld in dim moonlight the broad bosom of the Kabul—that river of powerful currents and treacherous eddies, river that had drowned a troop of British cavalry, and that only a few nights later, and at this

very place, was to drown some more men of another British regiment.

After the crossing of the river, a halt for ten minutes was called and from this stage onward, Ours was no longer a hearty regiment. The miles of dusty road and the sultriness consumed energies, and sweat had soaked through every khaki jacket. The cheer of the troops had languished. Fatigue had silenced the wits, the singers, and the whistlers, and thenceforward the march was a heavy straggling trudge with scarcely a word spoken till we reached Peshawar long after midnight.

There we found a cantonment strange and lonesome. It did not seem to be the same Peshawar. It did not look like the place we had marched away from a month before. Buildings and trees cast ghostly shadows, and the lines were as quiet as a graveyard. The barracks seemed deserted. There were no signs of military life, and at the moment when the regiment came to a final halt, the deep silence of the small hours was broken only by the barking of a dog in a neighbouring village.

But although we had come back to the same cantonment, we had not come back to the same quarters. Mobilization had brought many shifts and changes in our absence, and thus it happened that a strange barrack was pointed out as the one to be occupied by our company. Up the dark resounding stairs of that barrack we clambered, and as we went along the wood-floored verandahs, the ammunition boots of heavy-limbed accoutred men made a thundering clatter that must have scared every rat and mouse in a building that for days had known no troops.

The empty barrack-rooms we found only dimly-lighted by oil lamps. In fact there was but light enough to enable us to see our way. But this scant illumination was not a matter of much consequence now when there were only three things for a man to do : to put his rifle in the rack, to relieve himself of the burthen of his kit and equipment, and to find a place to lie down.

For repose there was no bedding. There were but the bare iron bedsteads. The mattresses were still locked up in the stores. But we had our two brown blankets. We could lie upon one of these, and use the other as a pillow. That makeshift would serve to rest tired frames. We needed no feather beds to sleep away the fatigue of the march. And little did we think of something to eat before lying down on those hard beds. None of us wanted food now. We would not have troubled to go into the next building if there a spread of tastiest viands awaited us. No, the body now asked

but for rest, and to sleep would be to dine. The fatigue that silenced tongues on the march had blunted the edge of appetite.

With the aid of the feeble light shed by those oil lamps, rifles were secured in the rack under lock and key—the Frontier regiment's first care. Then the men took off their equipment, their jackets, their puttees and boots, laid one blanket on the bare bedstead, and made the other serve as pillow. But in the room occupied by our section there was one man who did not, or could not, do things for himself in that manner.

After he had managed to put his rifle in the rack, this man approached the side of a cot, and attempted to sit down, but owing to his extreme fatigue, he fell backward on the bedstead, and though still encumbered with his equipment, and uncomfortably supported by the mess tin that pressed against the hollow of his back, he made no attempt to rise, but closed his eyes and in a moment was fast asleep. Nor did he, as might be expected, awake after a while, disencumber his body, and lie down like the other men. No, he never stirred, and just as he lay, snored away like an exhausted seaman.

Taking no further notice of the man, whose cot was opposite mine, and making my blankets serve for mattress and pillow, I lay down, and was soon fast asleep. And I slept till dawn. And when I awoke sparrows were chirping in the barrack-room, and I heard the notes of reveille sounded in some distant lines. I glanced around and saw that the exhausted man was still in the same position. There, with the light of dawn upon him, he still lay dressed and equipped, with his feet on the floor, the weight of his body on the bedstead bearing on the irksome mess tin, his head thrown back, his mouth wide open, and his upturned helmet lying on the bedstead where it had fallen off his head when he collapsed. The snoring had ceased. Sleep was now silent, and the sleeper's features wore a death-like calm.

The man's khaki jacket, wide open at the neck, was damp with perspiration. He was still encumbered with that bulging haversack, that water-bottle, patent entrenching tool, and sidearms. His bandolier was still crammed with ammunition, and he had on him his emergency ration, and his identity disc. He was equipped for service just as he had marched out of Peshawar a month before, and his person, his dress and accoutrement bore the signs of that month's experience.

His boots and the whole of his clothing and equipment were coated with the dust of the march. His hair, which was silvery and wayward at the fore fringe, was overgrown.

He had not shaved for several days, and dust and perspiration had smuttied his face and neck. His finger nails had long been untrimmed, and the backs of his hands were browned, roughened, and barked at one of the knuckles. The ends of his puttees had slipped off the uppers of his boots. One of the puttees had become loose, and it appeared as if it had but barely held to the end of the march. It had held but just long enough to enable the wearer to keep up with his fellows to the destination and to drag his heavy limbs up the stairs and into the barrack-room where his collapse showed that the march had tested him to the limit of his powers.

After I had been musing for some time on the barrack-room scene, the *bawarchi* (cook) entered, and calling out *cha!* placed a kettleful of tea in the middle of the room. The thud of the vessel on the resounding wooden floor, and the fall of the handle, made a loud noise—such a noise, one might think, as would rouse any man at reveille. But it did not break the sleep of the troops. It woke nobody. Not one opened an eye or stirred, and the man lying under arms was probably deafest of all to the sound.

By this time the light had increased in the barrack-room, and it appeared as if it had brought in more sparrows. And apart from the troops, the sparrows had the place all to themselves till a mouse appeared, and approached in the manner of every barrack-room mouse. It emerged from the background with caution and reconnaissance. Its path of approach was along the line where floor and wall met, but after a moment, having seen ahead and assured itself that all was clear, it gained boldness and ventured into the middle of the room. There it found some tiny morsel at which it nibbled, and while nibbling it was wary. Its little bright eyes were fixed upon me, for I was its only watcher.

After a while the section commander entered the barrack-room. The sergeant probably had had enough sleep, but all signs showed that the march was still in his bones. His joints were stiff, his heels were a little sore, he limped slightly, and he had put on slippers to ease his tired feet. He had turned in, as it seemed, merely to have a look round at his section. He stood in the middle of the room, and with his right hand outstretched, and holding the end of a cigarette between his thumb and index finger, surveyed the scene reflectively for a moment, and then without comment or murmur, walked out.

Musing and yawning for some little time after the sergeant had gone, I decided to get up. I felt that I needed no more sleep, though my joints were as stiff as any man's joints

might be after that march. I arose, and leaving the barrack-room to the mouse, the sparrows, and the sleeping troops, sauntered across to the area at the head of the ramp that rose from the level of the lines, filled the interval between the two barracks, and at first floor level, gave access to the rooms on either side.

Here I paused for a little while to look up and down the lines and note what might be stirring. But I could see no signs of military movement anywhere. No troops were to be seen on parade or off parade. Smoke was curling up from the chimney of a kitchen down the lines, and a menial who had just come out of that kitchen, dumped a bucketful of refuse into a bin. A bullock-cart, laden with firewood, was approaching the ration stand, and over on the road that ran by the lines, a tonga driver, loitering for a fare, and looking like a brigand, was closely spying the barracks. He must have known, or had guessed from signs, that the regiment had come back. And that was good news for him.

Indeed that tonga-driver over there may well have wished that not only one British unit of the field force, but all the British units, had come back, for it was plain that an affair that took white troops away from Peshawar, must be an ill wind for those Pathan hackney drivers. To them *jung* was likely to mean less fares. Consequently, well-informed men were they of moves that thinned the garrison and caused scarlet and white uniforms to be put away in stores. The tonga-men's ears were the acutest at this head-centre and capital of the North West Frontier. Into those ears the very air seemed to whisper the gup of the bazar on the one side, and the *Jernali* office on the other.

After I had been gazing for some time towards the interior of the cantonment, I turned about and faced in the direction of the Afghan border mountains, and putting my elbows on the parapet, looked down on the road that goes from Kabul to Peshawar. Along this road a man and a camel were journeying towards the capital town and mart of the Frontier. The man, an Afghan, was trudging ahead of the animal which he led by a piece of rein. The camel was laden with two large, bulging packages in coarse yarn sacking, balanced lengthwise on the animal's back. And of the contents of these sacks no passer-by could have any doubt, for they gave forth the acrid odour of a well-known export of Afghanistan—assafœtida.

Some distance behind the cameleer, another man, mounted on a pony, was advancing in the same direction. And this man, judging from his build and features, I took to be a Hazara, or a native of the Afghan province of that name. He was altogether unlike the owner of the camel. Indeed

the two travellers were so much unlike that they might pass for men of entirely different races and countries. But both were natives of the Amir's dominions, and though the Hazara's tongue might be a form of Persian, probably both could use the common Afghan speech—Pushtu.

The cameleer was by race a Ghilzai. He belonged to that powerful trading tribe from Afghanistan, nicknamed "Pow-indahs," from the bales of merchandise of which they are the carriers and traders throughout a great region of Afghanistan and north-western India. Big-boned, burly and uncouth was this man. His features were strong, heavy and morose. His nose was large and sharp-ridged. His hair was jet black and shaggy. And he trudged along in strong shoes that were sharply curved back at the toes and tapered like a rat tail.

The rider of the pony was a man of very short stature and short features, which were of the Tatar-Mongol cast; and the shortness of his stirrups drew attention to the shortness of his legs and dwarfish body. Rider and mount were very well matched—a little horse and a little man, and anyone seeing them might suppose that both had been bred in the same region.

The pony was going along at the peculiar ambling pace that is half walk and half trot, and that is in the manner of the pony of Afghan breed. It soon overtook and passed the camel, and I noticed that when they were abreast, the men did not pass the time of day to each other, as wayfarers of good will might have done. No, not a word or sign of salutation passed between those two fellow-subjects of the Amir. But if the past were brought to mind, little could it be expected that the man on the pony would exchange wayfarer civilities with that uncouth camel man.

For those Ghilzais, and for the Afghans proper, the Hazaras could have no love. Their treatment in other days by these peoples had not been forgotten. History had made wounds that time could not heal, and the story of former wrongs had been passed down from father to son. The Ghurka-like Hazaras were sturdy little fighters in their day, and stubborn defenders of their independence. It had taken the mighty Changhiz Khan a full decade to subjugate their country, and in generations the tyranny of Kabul had failed to break the back of their resistance.

How many kos of the long and toilsome route that goes by the Khyber those travellers had covered that morning, I could not guess, but they looked as if they had been some hours on the road. Flushed faces, the coating of dust on the animals, and on the men's clothing, beards, and eyebrows



were signs that they had been afoot before the peep of day. I supposed that the Ghilzai was bound for Peshawar, that there in the bazar he would dispose of his merchandise, and in return take back on his camel bales of fine fabrics for Kabul. What might be the object of the pony man's journey, I could not think; but I judged from his countenance that he had not come jogging along on that pony for curiosity. With his gaze steadily ahead, he had the look of a man of fixed purpose. Perhaps his business had to do with the execution of some contract on which labourers from his country were employed?—perhaps he was a middleman or negotiator between contractor and workmen? Circumstances gave some hint of occupation in that line.

The country of those hardy Hazaras is mountainous. The soil is poor, and the vital need sends forth many of its men to offer the labour of their arms for a wage. And good labourers the Hazaras are. They do a good day's work and are true to their salt. They are the men who bend their backs to the use of pick, spade and mattock. They toil at jobs which men of other races in Afghanistan would not touch. Theirs are the hands that shovel the great mounds of winter snow from the streets and house roofs of Kabul and Ghuzni. And the quest of employment takes them far from their native hills. They come through the passes, and they may be seen in places in the valley of Peshawar, and down in the Punjab, breaking stones, building new roads, or repairing old roads, sinking wells, or otherwise helping the engineer and contractor to the limit of their rude ability.

Camel and pony having gone their way, and passed out of sight, I continued gazing for a little while on the scenery of the level tract of country that stretched from the cantonment to the foot of the hills, and then went back to the barrack-room.

There everything was as it had been before I came out. The scene had had not changed. The men of the section were still in the same deep sleep. The exhausted man in accoutrement had not altered his posture, and I was sure that neither he nor any of the other men had stirred during my absence. The camp kettle stood where it had been placed by the hand that fetched it, and every sign convinced me that nobody had yet tasted that reveille tea, or "gunfire," as it was called. The mouse was still at its little game, still making venturesome sallies into the middle of the room, and then scampering back again to the wall. The sparrows had become bolder, and more "familiar." They were everywhere about the room now. They perched on the cots, on the pegs, on equipment and kits. They hopped on the bodies of the sleeping men, they clustered and balanced on the

window cords, and with their chirping, fluttering, and petty quarrels, they filled the place with noise.

But to the clamour of those barrack birds, the men lying on those hard cots were deaf as dead men. They slept on. They were beyond thought of chirping sparrows, of that reveille tea that was now cold, of the advance of the morning, of the sunrays that were on the verandah, of the last night's march, of the mischance that had brought the regiment back to Peshawar, and of the experiences of that field force that was now advancing through the defiles of the wild and remote hills.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE HILLS THAT LOOKED DOWN ON A GREAT VALLEY

A FEW days after the return of the regiment to Peshawar, news came that the advance of the field force into the hills had attained its object. Progress by the troops in the great heat of the season through steep mountain territory was contested, but step by step opposition was overcome, and that with light loss. Once again the long arm of the *sirkar* had prevailed. The tribe was forced to yield. The headmen came in and submitted to the Government's terms.

But many knew that this could not be the end. This tribe was overpowered, as it had been overpowered more than once before, but it would rise again. A few years maybe would pass in peace. The mullah would preach again, and not in vain. A *lashkar* would muster to issue from those same defiles, and in the ardour of revolt, pass beyond that line, the crossing of which sets the Peshawar brigade in motion.

However, the future might be left to its own concerns, as the easy-going man might say. The present trouble at any rate had ended. The field force came back. Demobilization ensued. Units returned to their own stations. The transport of array of mules, carts and camels dispersed, and all things that had come from service stores had been returned. Every sign of mobilization vanished. All was over. Another "show" had come and gone, and soon became but a memory.

And now that the "stone of peace" had been turned, as the Pathans say, now that every unit was in its own station, and that Peshawar was itself again, we had to think once more of that move to the hills of Cherat to which we had been looking forward before that midnight call took us out of our cots.

Delayed by weeks, this move for the sake of men's health, would now have to be carried out, and it would be only half

a good thing. It would split the regiment. It would put one wing on the hills and leave the other on the plains, and of this division the consequence would be that at the end of the hot season one half of the regiment would not be as healthy as the other. But this could not be helped. A station within view of the Khyber could not be left too weakly garrisoned at any time, and this being so, Peshawar could spare only two British half battalions to summer on a salubrious hill-top.

The move came off in due course. On a hot day in June, when doves were cooing on green trees, when shade was welcome to man and beast, and cool drinks were sought for parched throats, the "wing and headquarters" of the regiment started on its forty-one mile march to Cherat, leaving one half the barracks to rats and mice and sparrows, and the other half to those four companies whose turn for the hills would come next year—if all went well.

Cherat, beyond any doubt, was better for mind and body than any place in the plains. There we very soon became sensible of the benefits of the climate. There the temperature was never very high, and we were never pestered by mosquitoes. We were living about 4,000 feet above sea level. The air was clear and pure, and the two bungalows occupied by our own company was the airiest in the station. One was on the top of a hill, the other on the slope a little distance away, and both looked down on the valley of Peshawar.

The hills were sterile. No wood or garden was anywhere to be seen, nor even a patch of stunted pines, or a thicket. Everywhere stone and barrenness met the eye. Covert or food for bird or beast was as scarce as scarce could be. For horse, ox, or sheep there was no pasture. Goats would find no variety of herbage to browse upon or soft saplings to bark, and you might suppose that animals of prey here would be stunted, lean and wiry like all things that grew upon these hills. Everywhere slopes were but scantily clothed in thorny or prickly scrub, and there were places where footing was lost in soil of crumbling shale, and places uphill where troops in training were asked to have a care lest they dislodge boulders that were easily dislodged, and that once in motion went leaping down declivities with surprising velocity.

But there was a wild freshness and sweetness on those hills, and here a man breathed the purest air in the land. And mountain views were good for mind and eye. To the west, to the north, and to the south were hills and hills in interminable ranges. All around us were summits, slopes, and precipices, and northwards lay the plain of Peshawar beyond which were those mountains that extend away towards the towering altitudes of the Hindu Kush and the

mighty Himalayas. The sunsets beyond the Khyber were beautiful. In the distance the Indus was visible. At night the lights in the plain to the eastward showed where Nowshera cantonment lay, and charcoal fires that flamed on remote hillsides were objects at which flying sentries gazed in the quiet lonesome hours.

The hills of Cherat are a part of that transverse spur of the Frontier range that extends eastwards and approaches the Indus. These hills are called the Khattak hills, and their inhabitants, known as Khattaks, differ much from the other tribes of the North West Frontier. They are unlike their Afridi neighbours, the Jowakis Hassan Khel and they differ much also from the Pathans of the plain and highlands to the north. Their language is Pushtu, but this they do not articulate exactly like the Wazir, the Afridi, the Mohmand, or the men of Swat. Khattak speech has its little peculiarities.

The Khattaks being hillmen and Pathans are of warlike breed, but they are sober-tempered, and are not a troublesome tribe. Their ways are not those of the bandit clans of *Yaghistan*. They do not plunder the plainsman, and they do not raid, snipe or ambush. They may be called peaceable Pathans, and we are assured by those who know best that "they make excellent soldiers." They are of fair skin, stalwart build, and show great soundness and strength in bone and muscle. Their health and hardihood prove the salubrity of their native hills. To those who might inquire about the climate of Cherat, you might answer: "behold the Khattaks!"

Now shortly after our arrival in the hills some men of this tribe came under our eyes. Strapping fellows, whose footwear was of rudest sandals, would come up from their villages and hover around our bungalows in the hope that some chance job might fall to their strong arms. They had a keen scent for the work of porter or navvy. They eagerly sought employment, and seeing them on this quest you might wonder when indeed this strong work-seeking race of men had been sufficiently employed. Not maybe since the time when the military engineers sought their help to build this summer cantonment in the midst of their wild stony hills.

Sometimes we bought the help of those Khattaks for our own fatigues, such as on days of "gaffs" or sports when benches had to be carried long distances. On those occasions our men had only to nod, and instantly there would be an eager jostling rush for the proffered job. For a couple of annas, Tommy Atkins had at his service the finest labourers in the country. And these fair-skinned, straight-forward men could hardly be taken for an Asiatic race. There was

something European about them, and they seemed delighted to work with and for British troops.

So much for the Khattaks and the Khattak hills. Let a word now be said about the season from month to month.

June was hot, but it was a dry and wholesome heat, and after sunset and indeed throughout the night, a fresh breeze eddied around the small single bungalow that our section had all to itself, and that stood alone on the side of a hill above a precipice.

July brought rain, but only light showers that refreshed the stunted vegetation. These showers were but the fore-runners of the monsoon that comes late to this region. In August there were many days of heavy rain and mist, and then our company was at musketry. On several occasions firing had to be put off, and even when it was not raining vapour clouds used to hang so low as to screen the targets. On rainy mornings ours was the first section to hear that musketry had been declared off. About reveille the colour-sergeant from his little squat bungalow in the distance would hail our section commander and proclaim "no parade!" And that news used to reach our ears at a moment when it was pleasant to snuggle down for a little more sleep while the rain beat upon the iron roof.

In September there were cyclonic downpours that sent torrents leaping down boulder-strewn water-courses. There were some landslides in places, roads were damaged, and the transport mules labouring up the miles of steep gradient from the plains could not complete the journey in time. The ration carts then arriving late, our fare on that occasion could be no other than bully beef and biscuits.

After the September rains the weather cleared. Then indeed the finest weather of the season ensued. The climate was delightful. October was clear and crisp, and in the mornings of early November, the breath of winter was in the air.

Such then was the season on the hills. But what of the plains? And how were our friends down in Peshawar faring? As we looked across the plain a wooded spot which we could make out showed where the cantonment lay. From the hills to that spot the distance did not seem great as a crow flies, but it meant a great difference in climate.

As the season advanced, sickness among the troops down there had increased. News came of meagre parades and turns for guard duty coming round quickly. The station hospital was overflowing. The verandahs were full of cots. The incidence of fever had risen to an alarming degree. It

was, they were saying, one of Peshawar's sick years, which according to tradition come round at intervals of a decade or so and leave British troops debilitated and pallid.

About the time when this news from Peshawar was gloomiest, we in Cherat were in the highest health and spirits, but October having come, signs on every side were reminding us that our stay on those heights was drawing to a close. Winter was approaching. The days were shortening and the nights were getting colder, and the troops had become a little more reluctant in rising in the morning. The "rouse" now sounded very early indeed, and it seemed as if the bugler sounded at the hour of sweetest sleep. But once out of his cot and about, a man enjoyed the crisp air, and after the morning parade he came back with the pulse beat of high health, a glow upon the cheek, and an appetite that was good sauce for a barrack ration.

In due course the move to the plains is announced. It is all settled. Arrangements have been made for transport. Preparations begin. The troops spend the last week mainly on packing and baggage fatigues. Khattaks are hovering around the bungalows. They stand near and watch us at fatigues. We do not understand their Pushtu; they do not understand our English. But what need is there for such knowledge now? The Khattak's attitude speaks. It says: here we are men of the hills, men of strong arms, and seekers of work, why not let us do all this laborious lifting and carrying for you, and we will do it all for a few annas?

After another few days these brawny Khattaks will have no chance of earning such trifles. After our departure may be they will hang about the deserted lines, picking up and examining the things cast away by the troops. All military life will then have vanished. The bungalows will have been locked up till next year. The cantonment will have become a solitude. Through the long winter no drum beat or bugle call will wake the echoes. The empty buildings will look ghostly at night, and there will be but the cries of the hyena and jackal to break the silence of those stark lonesome hills.

This wing of the Gosling Greens may never see those hills again, but whether they return or not, they are not now leaving without a trace of their stay. They have left an enduring mark by which they will be remembered, and it is well worth while to explain what that was.

Soon after our arrival in Cherat we noticed that regiments that had been stationed here in former years had left little mementoes of their stay. They had carved their regimental crests on rocks, and these carvings signified two things: that the regiments concerned thought much of their crests, and

that each possessed a man or two skilled to carve a crest on a rock face.

Now could not Ours also do some work of this kind. The Gosling Greens had probably as many handy men as any other regiment, and they had reason to think that they could do anything that any other regiment could do. So now reminded by those examples anybody may have wondered whether there was not in our battalion of a thousand a man whose "trade" was in the line of stone-cutting or sculpture, and who by the exercise of this art could do for our regiment what other men had done for theirs?

Events showed that the answer to that question was "yes." Men of that skill just mentioned were at hand. A suggestion was submitted by somebody who was sure that the carving could be capably executed. The orderly room nodded approval, and the job was undertaken.

The stone chosen to bear the crest was no small one. It was a large and prominent rock that projected from a precipice on the side of the main road that led through the cantonment. Not a better rock nor a better position could have been chosen. There a sergeant and a private laboured on from day to day and from week to week, till at length the task was accomplished, the little rude scaffolding was dismantled, the coarse sacking that had screened the work was removed, and passers-by beheld the regimental crest glorified in stone.

Now soon after that little work in stone-carving art was accomplished, our stay in the hills had come to an end. The last day of our last week in Cherat had arrived. Baggage fatigues were over. At night the lines were occupied with laden carts and transport animals, and we went to bed knowing that everything was ready for the march next morning.

We have a short sleep. Reveille sounds long before dawn—the earliest reveille that we had yet known in these hills. But even before the call had sounded we were up and getting ready. It is chilly, wintry and dark, outside, and inside the barrack oil lamps shed but a dim light. We fuss and hurry and do things as best we can with the aid of that dim light. A ghostly *bawarchi* enters the barrack-room, and what he has brought we consume in great haste. The quarter's dress sounds. We don our equipment, think and look around to make sure that we have forgotten nothing. Then we quit that little bungalow on the hillside that our section had all to itself for six months, and without a glance back or a token of adieu, for the last time hurry down the path to the parade ground.



There the array of baggage carts, mules and camels proclaims the exodus. Companies stand about in groups and then after a few moments fall in. Looks and tones of all ranks betray the influence of the occasion—this parade spells a big change. Faces are mellow and without a trace of strain. There are no signs of impatience this morning, and words that command have no sharpness. Nothing jars, and all is in harmony. This half regiment bound for the plains and leaving the hills to winter is in a happy humour.

Transport in order, baggage secure, escorts told off, and everything as it should be. The companies are all present. The band and drums are in front spick and span, and with their instruments and their burnished brasses glittering in the rising sun. Present and correct! The adjutant reports. The C. O. gives the formal command. The column moves on to the main road. The march begins.

"At ease!" The troops sling arms, and there is a movement of instruments in the band. The tall drummer aproned in leopard skin lifts the big drum. The bandmaster says something to the band sergeant and the latter passes on the word. Music cards are fixed. For a moment we wonder what march has been chosen from the band's great repertory, but we can trust our bandmaster for an apt choice. Never does he fail to suit the music to circumstance, and now the air that he selects has a light tristful burthen. It is not a composition from one of the "march kings," but it is a fine marching tune. It is spirited, it is melodious, and the music is worthy of that glittering band.

Everyone is now indeed "at ease." As they swing along pals chat and joke, and hands go to pockets in search for cigarettes and matches. And as we go along hillmen line the roadside in places and keenly watch the march-past of the *ghora paltan* bound for the plains. What now are the thoughts of the poor Khattaks?

One by one every place and object that had been familiar to us during those six months passes out of view. The bungalows on the heights can no longer be seen. Bungalows elsewhere, and other little buildings for this and that are soon shut out by the bends of the hilly road. And then we come to an object that is not familiar and that most of us behold for the first time—that crest upon the bold rock carved on a scale that dwarfed the chiselled handiworks of all those other regiments!

How could we pass by that rock without some little gesture of homage—that rock that bore the symbol and motto of the regiment? All eyes are fixed upon it. The commanding officer assumes a diagonal position on the saddle.

The adjutant does likewise. Exclamations or comment there are none. No word is spoken, but eyes tell. The gaze of the troops spoke salute, and the salute was to merit. The work of that sergeant and private had come under the judgment of the regiment and it had passed.

But our march is down a winding road, and the bold rock and its sculpture are soon out of sight. A little further on, another turn of the way behind the shoulder of a hill, and the cantonment has vanished. We have left Cherat behind, and now for miles it is a march on a steep down grade along a twisting road that leads to the first camping stage on the plain where we shall rest for the night.

"No tents!" was the order here, and we are gladdened by the words. Hurrah for the open bivouac in moonlight or under a starry sky!—No tents to pitch, no trenches to dig, and no perimeter to guard. True, we had no green grassy field but a bare sunbaked surface where there were pebbles, and here and there some fine thistle-like thorns. But the ground was as dry as a bone, and with our rug and two blankets we did very well. And through the night our flying sentries that we called "prowlers," guarded our arms, for this tract under the shadow of the hills was ground that knew the tread of the rifle-thief. We were still within Khattak territory, but the Afridi was not far off, and it was wise to imagine that he might come light-footed as a mouse at the hour before cock-crow when the camp's slumber was deepest.

But all went well. The marauder came not. Our rest was undisturbed. The night passed in peace, and our sleep was sweet till reveille. And when then we awoke, we felt as all healthy men may feel when they open their eyes and behold above them no house roof, or tent, but the canopy of the morning sky.

Once arisen we were brisk, and all that we had to do we did in a jiffy. We were soon ready for the march, and when we moved off the east was promising the sun. A haze lay over the flat country that stretched away towards the Indus, and on the west the Frontier hills were not yet clear to view. The Sufaid Koh was visible by its whiteness, but it awaited the sunburst to make its snowy crown a scene of wintry splendour. The morning was chilly and Pathans we passed on the way had their shoulders wrapped in shawls. But it was good weather for marching, splendid weather for marching, and everybody looked in fine fettle. Now once more on the plain and a straight level road before us we felt as if we could march for leagues without a halt. But to the next stage was no great stretch. The march was short and that camp ahead we reached by midday.

But though the march was not long, it brought a great change. It brought us to a spot on the verge of the high road that goes to the Khyber, and there things were not at all like they were in the camp we had just left. The place was in open country and many miles from the hills, but troops who camped here for the night had to be wary. And now that we had arrived we found that it was not to be another bivouac. We had to pitch tents, use entrenching tools, and for practice, man trenches as we might man them if the camp were to be attacked. And if we had to be mindful of our arms in that other camp, we had to be even more mindful here. For rifle thieves the place had a bad name. It was one of the worst spots in all the country west of the Indus.

By dusk, however, all that had to be done by way of precaution had been done. And then the thought occurred to somebody: what about a little entertainment? And the suggestion took effect. A concert was organised at the spur of the moment. Songs were sung round a log fire and near a tapped canteen barrel. All went well, and after a hearty time we went to our tents and lay down. But we did not sleep very well here for the earth was cold and damp, and so not at all like the high and dry ground on which we bivouacked the night before.

The hours of darkness passed without event. There had been no alarm. No rifle was missed at dawn. All things were as they should be at reveille. Then all that had to be done was done quickly. In due time we struck tents, loaded baggage, and on a grey chilly morning resumed the march along the dusty road to Peshawar cantonment, where we reunited with the other wing and became once more a complete regiment.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE SPEECH OF STRONG MEN

A YEAR had now passed since that chill misty morning in November when I crossed the Indus with a thousand fellows, and came, a wondering stranger into the land of the Pathans. And in that year I had gained much knowledge of this region. I had been in the country during the circle of the seasons, and so had experienced the extremes of its climate—the torrid heat of summer and the intense cold of winter. With camps, barracks, cantonments, and posts in hill and plain, I had become familiar. Of the Frontier's defence system I had learnt a good deal, and I had seen columns in action, and tribal lashkars warring with the forces of the *sirkar*.

My eyes had been directed to those passes that had formerly been, and might again be, used as pathways to the conquest of India. And of the geography of all those passes, and of all the territories of the North West, much knowledge had come to me from the printed word and from the lectures of experts. Oh, and what great rustling maps were those that straddled the blackboard to illustrate those lectures, and how bold was the scale and luminous the detail that showed every river, torrent bed, hill, pass and valley from the silent snowy wilds of the remote Pamirs down to the scorched arid, territory of the Baluch!

So then, although my eyes and ears were not closed to further instruction, I had come to think that I knew as much about this region as it was necessary for a man in the ranks to know.

This was a happy notion. This was contentment, but it was not lasting; and well can I recall the occasion when it came to an end. It was on the afternoon of a cold winter's day when I was strolling through the Sudder Bazaar of Peshawar. There a little thing happened that not only disturbed this spirit of contentment, but induced me to yield my mind to a new concern.

Idling along a lane in that bazaar, I stopped at a dingy little shop kept by a second-hand dealer, one of the cheap jacks. Here the jumbled stock-in-trade showed the hawker's gatherings from the cantonment, and it included a number of old books, all of which had been well thumbed by military hands. The stock exhibited not only old editions of manuals on drill, tactics, musketry, and what not, but also some grammars and texts in oriental languages.

While examining one of the books, and addressing a word or two of inquiry to the dealer, I noticed a man seated on a chair in a corner of this squalid little shop. And I soon became aware that this man, who had a *hookah*, or smoking tube, within arm's reach, was closely observing me. Indeed I believe that from the moment he caught sight of me, his eyes never left me. Whenever I glanced at him, I found his gaze upon my countenance, and when he stooped and had a prolonged gurgling draw at the *hookah* with furrowed brows, he was still eyeing me.

The man's dress was decent, and one thing conspicuous about it was that the lower garment, or trousers, bagged remarkably below the knees, and seemed widest over the shoes where it was lightly checked or gathered. This was a Pathan style of dress, but it was not to be taken as a sure sign that the wearer hailed from the Pathan hills.

From his appearance he would be taken as a man of some education. His features expressed a good deal of character and intelligence, sharpened by contact with the world. He impressed me as a man who knew his business well, though I could not think what that business might be.

At length, addressing me, he inquired how long I had been on the North West Frontier, and I replied to the question in two words. Then he put other questions to me, and to these I replied to the best of my knowledge. But I perceived from his tone and from the expression of his eyes that his object was not to obtain information, but to make me expose my ignorance.

There was a silent interval for a moment while the questioner had another long draw at the *hookah*, and then came four more questions from him, and four more replies from me, thus :

Did I know Arabic ?

No.

Did I know Persian ?

No.

Did I know anything about Urdu ?

Yes ; but not very much.

Did I know Pushtu—the language of the Pathans ?

Not a word.

“Oh, you know nothing!” said the questioner, with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile that spread all over his features. And again he stooped to the *hookah*.

Now I was convinced that the man was right in thinking as he spoke, but not in speaking as he thought, and I believe that had my temper been in a different state his blunt remark might have drawn from me words with some point upon them. But as it happened I was in an easy humour that afternoon. So I merely smiled at what that strange *hookah*-smoker had said, and a moment later I left that mean little place and went my way.

It was now getting late, and having nothing to do in the bazaar, I turned homewards, and sauntered away in the direction of the military part of the cantonment. But I had not gone very far before I suddenly became aware of the presence of that questioning stranger in the baggy Pathan dress. But in expression he was not now the same person. His attitude had altered. He had approached me in the manner in which any man of Asiatic race in quest of a favour might approach a European.

With a hum and a haw, he resumed the subject of the questions he had put to me in the little shop, and blandly suggested that now that I was stationed in the North West Frontier, I might as well acquire as much knowledge of the country as possible. But he added that I could not obtain such knowledge without knowing the speech of the Frontier. Pathans were inarticulate unless addressed in their own tongue. Urdu and Persian, though very useful languages, would not serve in this region. Pushtu was the *but*, and what was more, a foreigner speaking in that language was regarded by the tribesmen as a Pathan in spirit and sympathy.

Having thus driven home the opening point, the man thereupon made known his profession to me. He declared that he was a teacher of oriental languages ; that he was a certificated munshi of the premier order, had unrivalled experience, and possessed testimonials that had been yellowed by age. “I can,” he said in effect, “show you how to understand this country in an interesting way. I can make you fluent in the tongue of all the tribes from Chitral to Chaman. Follow my advice and my teaching and you will come by benefit.

The munshi said all this in correct English, but with a slight drag. His speech was more lucid than free and fluent, and he did not venture into original modes of expression. He

seemed to feel for the correctness of his sentences as he talked on.

And now that I had to reply to this suggestion, I had to utter doubts. How could it profit me to acquire a knowledge of the Pathans? I asked the munshi. I was only a man in the ranks. For an officer of course it was different. For him little bracketed letters in the army list that denoted proficiency in some language or other was no doubt a desirable thing, and might even be a positive recommendation for some fancied billet.

But I was assured by the munshi that the study of this language would profit me. The examination was as free to me as it was to those of highest rank, and should I be successful, as I ought to be with due application, I would be entitled to a decent reward in money from the Government of India.

Thus did this experienced coach assure me. Thus did he dispose of every doubt raised. He had, I supposed, in his time persuaded many others in similar circumstances; and now he persuaded me. I was at length convinced. I accepted his advice, and we decided to meet next day to arrange terms.

These terms having been put upon paper, I then, according to my instructor's advice, bought the standard manual of the language, and the prescribed texts, and threw myself heart and soul into the study of Pushtu. And well and competently did this munshi coach me. He did more indeed than unfold to me peculiarities of accidence and syntax in this strange guttural tongue. While giving me all the skilled tuition at his command, he was enlightening me about the character of the races who spoke this language. He used to take me into the villages of the Pathans, not only for practice in tongue and ear, but also to instruct me in the ways and customs of the villagers. And everywhere those Pathans were hospitable. My utterance of their own greeting phrases won me a welcome wherever I went, and the fact that I was learning their language was in itself a recommendation.

At length the time came when my advancement in the bat enabled me to go about alone and chat for practice with all types of people. Henceforth I looked upon every Pathan that came my way as a possible instructor, and I had now begun to learn for myself from the Frontier-man's own lips. My esteem for the language too was growing. I had even begun to think that this vigorous Pushtu furnished intellectual exercise as good in a way as the most polished of modern languages.

And important is the territory throughout which is spoken this language that has no literature, and has no daily news paper to be shouted in the bazaars. Its limits may not be strictly defined. You may fix the Indus as its eastern boundary, but the language is understood far eastward of that great parting waterway; and if you utter it in the bazaars of Rawalpindi, and even in cantonments farther down country, it will surely be comprehended by many. In Afghanistan you may fix its eastern boundary at the Helmund, but inhabitants of places far beyond that river are not strangers to Pushtu, which indeed is the common speech of all true Afghans.

To me it seemed that all the people whose business brought them from the west and the north-west through the Frontier passes had some knowledge of the tongue. Every man whom I greeted or questioned in Pushtu, replied in Pushtu. And among those whom I accosted on the highway, many, by all signs, were not of the Pukhtun race.

There were, for instance, wayfarers of Persian and Turkish stock from remote parts beyond Kabul, from the fringes of Russian territory, from the Oxus, from Turkestan, and from distant Bokhara. Among these people were some Tajiks and Turkomans, and some little sturdy Hazaras to whom comes the call when navying is needed, and who were the Amir's sappers. And then there were the common men of the caravans, the *kafila* traders of the big-boned and robust frame, morose visage, and black, shaggy locks. Afghans in country and language, but not in race, those born camelmen, sprung from the powerful Ghilazai tribe, were the "bale-carriers" who drove the trade from Afghanistan and from Bokhara to that chief Frontier town, and trafficked in carpets and fruits and other products in exchange for the fineries of the Indian bazaars.

By exchange of Pukhtun civilities with strangers who went to and fro, by chatting with dust-covered trudgers of the highway, and with riders of camels and ponies, I was not only learning the language, but gaining knowledge of the country and its people. From the mouth of the rudest man came words that enlightened me. Not one but could impart to me some little knowledge. And from travellers whose ears had caught the gossip of the bazaars of Kabul, much information did I gain concerning life and times in the dominions of the absolute Amir.

These wafarers had much to tell me about the climate of these regions, and the effects of its extremes on the life of the people. They spoke of the rigours of the Afghan winter, of the great snows that overwhelmed Kabul, and kept the



people huddled indoors for weeks. They described the intensity of the cold, the night winds that pierced to the bone, and the desolate state of the snow-bound city when darkness set in. They brought tales of deaths from exposure, of soldiers frozen at their posts, of the great mounds of snow that encumbered the streets and burthened house roofs, of ice-bound tracks where camels slipped and broke their legs, of the extreme hardships at times when wolves driven from the mountains by hunger, ravaged Kabul by night, and killed and devoured all persons found benumbed and helpless from the cold.

Thus did my practice in the acquirement of this strange language go on from day to day till the time came round when I had to prove my proficiency at a test. But I did not look forward with confidence to this trial. I was satisfied with the progress I had made in learning the language so far, but I felt that my ability was below the required standard.

In the examination there were four parts. In three of these perhaps I might pass, but not in the fourth, and that was the colloquial test. In that I was weakest. I might succeed in talking with one type of Pathan, but not with another. I might pass, say, in conversation with a plainsman, but not with a hillman. Yet, even so, my *ustaz* had hopes of my success. But I knew my shortcomings.

Let words be spared. I failed. When put to the test I chatted very well with one tribesman, but not with another, and that other was a man of the Afridis, who in their articulation, and even in their use of some forms of the verb, differ much from the other Pathan tribes. That difference spelt failure for me. I was beaten in a dialogue with a brigand-like man from the fastnesses of Tirah. But the examiner, knowing how far I had got, and how far I had yet to go, spoke a word of encouragement. He suggested that I might try again six months later. And the answer I had in mind for that suggestion was "perhaps."

In the recess after the examination, my crammer went down-country, or to the Punjab side of the Indus, which seemed to be his homeland, though he claimed to be of Pathan race. Weeks and weeks passed, and the season was spring, when one fine morning I spied him striding down the lines and heading for our bungalow. At that moment I felt like a school-hating boy who sees his master towards the end of a pleasant vacation, for by this time I had almost begun to wish that my *ustaz* would stay away altogether and leave me alone.

He was looking his best, and his face broadened into great smiles as he approached me. He greeted me with great

heartiness, and used the Pathan salutation, and I perceived from his looks that he had come back fresh and eager to resume coaching. The prolonged holiday, it appeared, had not dulled but sharpened his teaching faculty.

After compliments, however, I made known to him by look and tone that my zeal for language learning had ended with the examination, and that during his absence I had scarcely looked at a book. I confessed that I had indeed all but given up the study of Pushtu, and that the knowledge I had already acquired had rusted. Besides I had come to doubt my ability to attain full proficiency in this language.

But to that experienced coach all this was nonsense. He countered my doubts in slowly-spoken and telling phrases. And again I found him convincing. His words persuaded and encouraged me. He revived my enthusiasm. I resolved to try again. I went back to my books and notes, and again sought colloquial practice wherever I could obtain it, till the day came when I found myself again awaiting my turn for examination on the verandah before that same building.

There as the time dragged my mind was in tension. Was I to pass, or was I to fail? That question made me a little anxious and a little nervous, and my mind was still under strain at the moment when I heard a tap on the gong of a neighbouring guard-room. Then instantly a door opened, a bamboo chick screen was drawn aside, and there confronting me was the president of the examining committee with the list of candidates in his hand.

Standing on the top step with a frank, agreeable expression, his shoulders a little squared, and his chest a little forward, he read out the first few names on the list. Mine came third, and I answered "present." Number one had likewise answered, but for number two there was no reply. I looked up and down the verandah and repeated the name aloud, but there was no response. That candidate was not to be found, and I told the examiner so.

The examiner paused and looked at me with keen earnestness as if he thought that I could somehow account for the absentee. But that I could not do. Had I known, or had I heard that the man had spent the previous evening in jollity at some mess in barracks, I might, founding a guess on probability, venture to answer for him right off and say *Aegrotat!* But that missing candidate was altogether beyond the reach of my knowledge. He belonged to another station, and he was not a military man at all, but a civil engineer in the service of the *sirkar*.

However, the absence of one man was a matter of no great consequence. The examination opened. The first on the

roll was called, and I being now number two, stood near the door awaiting my turn. And I had not very long to wait. Number one came back sooner than I had expected, and when he reappeared at the door, I fancied he had success written upon his brow. I believed from his easy confident look that he had passed right off without a faltering sentence.

My name being called, I entered the examination room, and there found the president of the committee, or chief examiner, seated centrally at a table. Another officer who seemed to be his junior in years and rank, was seated a little back from the table on the opposite side, while the candidate occupied a chair which was placed about a yard from the table on the president's right.

On the table in front of the president was a single sheet of paper on which were printed about a dozen sentences in English. And at the first glimpse of this brand new sheet, I became convinced of two things. Firstly, that those sentences had not been framed to be easily translated; and, secondly, that this printing must have been kept a pretty close secret. At the same time I was sure from what I had heard that those two officers who conducted this part of the examination had been picked for the duty because they had attained special proficiency on this tongue. Both occupied posts that brought them into close contact with the Pathan hillmen; both had need to talk Pushtu daily, and from practice, it was supposed, had become experts in the language.

In this introductory test the procedure was simple. The examiner read out the sentences one at a time, and the candidate gave his version in Pushtu. And under this trial I think I did fairly well. There was only one sentence on which I stumbled. The structure of that sentence was tricky, and no doubt, was so on purpose. Here again was that subjunctive that is troublesome in more than one language. At first I did not get the right turn of the verb. The examiner paused. Then, recollecting the rule, I tried again, and I believe my rendering satisfied the examiner.

With the other sentences I had no difficulty, and, as an intimation of my success in this test, I was asked to return at three in the afternoon for the second part of the examination. And before I arose to leave the room, the examiner requested me not to divulge a word to anybody concerning the contents of that paper by which I had been tested. I duly promised to keep mum, went forth from the building and headed for barracks.

Having returned at the appointed hour in the afternoon, and having been called into the same room for the colloquial

test, and the critical test, I found a change. Only one of the examiners was now present. This was the junior officer, who, for the purpose of this test, had brought into the room two Pathans.

When I had taken a seat, the examiner asked me to have a chat with one of these Pathans. I did so, and all went well. It struck me now that I was far better prepared for this examination than I had been for the last one. I felt as if I had gained a more flexible and readier command of the *bat*. I had acquired a greater *Pukhtun* glibness, and the dialogue with this tribesman had become free and spirited at the moment when the examiner stopped it and asked me to have a talk with the other man.

Ah, here was greater difficulty. Whereas the one with whom I had just been talking so freely might be deemed a typical native of the north-western border, this other man belonged to a tribe to whom some would deny the title of Pathan. He was an Afridi. He came of that powerful martial clan whose country lies to the south of the Khyber, and who in *jung* could muster thirty thousand guerillist bundook-men.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, the Pushtu spoken by this great tribe is more difficult to understand than the Pushtu spoken by other tribes. And this being so, examining committees always took care to have a member of that tribe present for those colloquial tests. Hence this Afridi now confronting me. And no conversable man was he. Whereas the one with whom I had just been chatting, was a frank and straightforward speaker of the language, this was a sullen hillman not at all disposed for free talk. His articulation too was low and indistinct, and in his turns of expression there was rude sarcasm which amused the examiner.

However I was not beaten this time in talk with a man of brigand blood from the wilds of Tirah. I sustained the conversation to the satisfaction of the examiner, who, closing the dialogue, asked me to attend next morning for the further part of the examination. This signified that I had got through the hardest of the four tests. Now I gained confidence. True, I was not yet out of the wood, but I fancied I could perceive the light of success ahead.

The examination next morning was not held in the room where the first tests had taken place. It was held in an adjacent apartment, an oblong chamber which was furnished with a row of small tables on either side. Here everything had been arranged in a manner that might be said to give dignity to this examination, which was a *sirkar's* affair with a worthy tradition. In other words it was a Government of

India examination, the origin of which might be traced back to a system adopted in the days of Lord Wellesley to enable young officers in the service of the East India Company to acquire proficiency in oriental languages as part of their training.

As he sat at a little table on his own, each candidate saw set before him, a brand new pad, a fresh clean blotter, a polished pewter inkstand filled with fresh ink, and a new penholder and nib. And there was that same officer by whom I had been examined the previous afternoon, again sole authority and sole director of procedure—an officer whose daily duties brought him face to face with me of the most brigandish and warlike tribe on the North West Frontier. He was dressed in the same suit of mufti, and he had assumed the role of examiner with grace and easy competence.

When all were seated, the examiner placed a sheet of foolscap on each man's writing pad, and then distributed the examination papers. This done, the officer had only one simple direction to give, and that was to say that each candidate should write at the top of his sheet of foolscap, his name, and his corps, or the department of Government service to which he belonged. This instruction complied with, all might start right off on this exercise in composition the translation of a printed passage in English into written Pushtu.

Having read over this passage two or three times, I reflected for some moments, and the conclusion I came to was that the translation of those stately English sentences must be very free indeed. Plainly it was a matter of giving a correct interpretation of the passage in simple terms which would be grasped at once by the mind of the man whose knowledge was bounded by Pushtu. If a Pathan had picked up this paper on the road, and being curious, had brought it to me and asked me to explain the gist of its contents, how should I do so?

There was the point of the essential, and with light from the suggestion in my mind, I started upon the exercise. And such concentration did I bring to the effort, that during the whole time I never looked up, or looked to the right or left, took no tice of anybody else, and cannot now say how many other candidates there were in the room. All that I was aware of was that each man sat alone at a little table and was working at the same exercise; that the examiner was there all the time, that his eyes were open, and that there was no possible chance here for resort to the artifices of the neighbourly schoolboy.

At length, when I had completed the translation, at which I took plenty of time, the examiner, taking up my paper, directed me into an adjoining room, there to undergo the final part of the trial, there to be tested in the words of the syllabus, at "reading and constructing portions of the text-books."

Here alone at a table sat the examining committee's third member, now seen by me for the first time. And this was not a British officer, but an eminent representative of the Pushtu-speaking race, a robust man of stalwart figure and bold presence. He held high office in the political department, and had rendered important services to Government. These services had been rewarded. He had already been honoured by Government, and it was his destiny to come by still greater honours and to attain higher office in later years. Of the language of this region he had an unrivalled knowledge. He was a master of the tongue of Afghan and Pathan.

Of the texts in which I was examined by this official, one was a work recounting the exploits of a conquering Afghan whose triumphant sword had won him the spoils of India, and these were the spoils of the Hindu—plunder of bunnia, plunder of rajah, palace and temple. The other text contained a collection of tales and fables, and neither this nor the other text if read aloud would be dull to the ear of anyone of the *Pukhtun* race. Let a man recite passages from these books at some spot on the highway, or beneath a shady tree in a Frontier village, or in a bazaar in remote Kabul, and in the twinkling of an eye the reciter would be surrounded by the most attentive audience in the world.

Selecting passages from these books, the examiner asked me to read them aloud. I did so, and in the course of this reading, I was asked by him to construe and explain certain sentences in the text. And I believe that at this reading and construing I did pretty well. There was no pause or doubt. No difficulty checked me, and my explanations were given with readiness.

The examiner was spare in words. His utterance was confined to the asking of the necessary questions. Not a syllable of comment came from his lips, but from the manner in which he went from passage to passage and flicked over the pages, it appeared to me that he was satisfied with my reading and understanding of these texts. And when at length he closed the book, nodded, and said "thank you!" I arose from my chair with a certainty that I had not failed at this final part of the examination.

When I reached the verandah and picked up my helmet from a bench, I muttered to myself "thank heaven!" for I

felt rejoiced that this two days' trial was over, and with a great relief in spirit and a light heart I headed for quarters.

It was now about noon, and the noon of a fine sunny April day it was. The atmosphere was clear for a view of long distances, and if you looked towards the north your gaze lingered on the snowy grandeurs of the Hindu Kush. There winter still prevailed, but down here in this genial plain the breath of spring was warming the land. The lark sang, the wild dove cooed, the coppersmith bird tonked, sparrows chirped, and in many a place near trees and shrubs, the air was sweetly scented.

That same evening, relieved from the little strain that this examination had brought upon me, and in mental ease and peace, I sat alone at a rude table over a mug of ale drawn from a canteen barrel, and I mused on the experiences of those past two days, and on all that had happened since that wintry afternoon when first I met that munshi and gave ear to his words.

Days and weeks passed. The brief northern spring had ended, and the hot weather had sent the troops to the hills when the good news came. An issue of the Government gazette appeared, published the result of that examination and dispelled all doubts. My name was in the list, and my success being certified, there came to me in due course the reward in money. Oh, and what a great cheque it was! What a big disbursement from the exchequer of the Government of India to a man in the ranks!

Soon after there followed my meeting with the munshi. With him I settled a final account. And the little business accomplished, the munshi smiled, and recalling that wintry afternoon when first we met in the Sudder Bazaar, he said in his slow, cautious words: "well, has it not been as I said it would be?"

I acknowledged that the promises he had held out to me at our first meeting had not been fulfilled. In chosen words I complimented the teacher, and I thanked him. Then we parted. And it happened that I never saw that man again.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### SIGHT OF HIMALAYAN SNOWS AND SMELL OF PINES

At the end of the last chapter but one, it was stated that after the return of our four companies from Cherat we had become once more a united battalion at Peshawar. But we have now to add that the reunion of those two regimental wings meant the meeting of robust men with debilitated men, the meeting of four strong and healthy companies with four weak and unhealthy companies.

The wing of the regiment that had spent the hot season in the plains was still sickly. It had still the "Peshawar fever" in its bones. The station hospital was full, and the recurrence of fever was distressing. Today a man is apparently well and doing his duty. Tomorrow morning, shivering and aching, he has a haversack slung from his shoulder, and the orderly corporal has taken his "particulars."

Now that the winter had come round, we had again that Frontier weather that braces and hardens British troops; and so it was hoped that those men who had spent the summer in the plains would benefit from the change of season and may be regain health. But this change for the better did not come about. Fever, or the effects of fever, still clung to those unfortunate four companies, and kept them unfit. Such sickness and debility would of course be a serious matter for any regiment anywhere, but it was most serious for a regiment on this Frontier where soundest health and utmost fitness were demanded to meet the calls of service that might come at any time in this region, and that might arduous and prolonged campaigning.

So, plainly, something had to be done. Action had to be taken, and action was taken. The principal medical officer spoke. He recommended that the regiment should have a change of station. Only by such a change, he declared, could those four companies be restored to health.



The medical plea was accepted. The proposal became a decree. In due course orders were issued for the transfer of the regiment to Rawalpindi. The move was announced, and it meant a change of station not only for one regiment, but for three regiments. Preparations went ahead, and on a sunny morning in March, the regiment could be seen entraining at Peshawar station. There a band was present to play farewell music, and there too was present the commander of the division who had come down to speak parting words of cheer and encouragement. And those words did truly cheer and encourage, for they were spoken by a general who had won the confidence of the troops. He was a general whom men delighted to see and hear, and now his very presence inspired this regiment that regretted to be leaving his command.

Rawalpindi, for which we were bound, was not only the headquarters of the Northern Army, as it was then called. It was the most important military station in India east of the Indus. It was the main reserve base for operations on the North West Frontier, and we were reminded on leaving Peshawar, that although we were going a hundred miles down country, we would, while at Rawalpindi, be still within the call of the Frontier command, to whom we were now so well known. And, furthermore, this transfer would provide us with that which, first of all, the P.M.O. desired. It would give us a hill station in which not half but the whole regiment could stay for seven months of the year. It would enable all of us to spend the hot weather on the salubrious Murree Hills.

All this was very well, but I am certain that if it had been a matter of choice, nobody in the regiment, not one man in the thousand, would have voted for this change. All would have preferred to remain within view of the Khyber; all would have preferred to stay in Peshawar, with its colds and its heats and its fevers, with its restlessness and uncertainties, its alarms, raids and risings, its prowling sentries, pickets, movable columns and sudden mobilizations.

Now, as a narrator, I have to mention here that the few words I have written about the departure of the regiment from Peshawar station on that morning in March, came to me from hearsay. I was not present with the regiment on that occasion. I was one of the advance party that had been sent off to Rawalpindi some days before, and so by the time the main body arrived, we men of that advance party had learnt the ways of the new station. We had gone here and there. We had rambled all over the cantonment, got to know where the various units of the garrison "lay," had taken note of their barracks and their ways of doing things; had

sauntered through bazaars, chatted with fellows of other regiments, and had drunk beer in several canteens.

And the result of this experience was that when the main body joined us, we could tell them that however much we all may have regretted to leave Peshawar, there could be no doubt that 'Pindi was a place that gave far more freedom to a man. In Peshawar, as has been remarked in another chapter, a regiment was almost confined to the cantonment. There by day men rarely went beyond the Sudder Bazaar, and after nightfall no one might venture beyond barrack limits. In Pindi, on the other hand, it seemed that walking-out liberties extended to the horizon. A man might go anywhere he liked, and if he had a permanent pass he could stay out all night.

But while the regiment was learning the ways of the new station, its thoughts and its talk were of the hills—the Murree hills—for the hot weather was coming on. A few weeks passed and brought dust-storms and warmer weather, mornings of vernal freshness, and mellow lingering twilights. And then, on a fine April day, in the cool of the morning, when the dew was fresh and sweet, our whole battalion with the band and drums at its head, started from the barracks of West Ridge on the forty-one mile march to those barracks among the pines in the distant hills.

This indeed was a move without strain or haste. It was a leisurely march of three stages to a pleasant destination. The first stage, a distance of fourteen miles, was along a level stretch of country, and in a north-easterly direction towards hills that were enveloped in a bluish haze—those hills that were offshoots into the Punjab from the great Himalayan system.

The rest camp at the end of this first march was on the verge of the plain. Beyond that point the landscape changed. No longer was there flat arable land on either side, but stony ground and scrub for the most part. Through this tract the road wound on a light upward incline to the next rest camp, which was on high ground at the foot of the hills. There we arrived early in the afternoon, rested for the night, and soon after daybreak, when the air was fresh and cool, we were again on the move.

'For the third and last stage we had before us a stretch of fifteen miles along the slopes of a wooded hill. It was a stiff climb for a good way along heights that were clothed with pines. And here we were treading a road, steep and winding, that had been built by military engineers sixty years before. These men were pioneers. They came and explored this tract, and having found a route with tolerable gradients

and curves, they opened a highway to the hills of Murree and to distant Kashmir. Before the days of that achievement, those hills were but a wilderness.

Beyond the point where the main ascent had been achieved by a succession of steep windings, the road, pursuing the contour on an easier grade, passed for some miles through a wooded belt where in places the trees intermingled their branches and arched the way. In this part, where the sun was shut out, and there was deep shade, we saw many monkeys on trees. They were wild, grey and slim creatures, and, true to simian instincts, they were capering among the branches and giving fine displays of agility. And you might imagine that they had chosen those wayside trees for a resort because they wanted to show themselves to man passing by, and to demonstrate to him the skill of their species as gymnasts.

At length, and shortly after we had resumed the march after a rest for ten minutes, there came with a turn of the road, a change of scenery that thrilled the mind and brought an expression of wonder into men's eyes. After our gradual winding climb of twenty miles from the plain, we had now reached a height of seven thousand feet, and had come to the verge of a region, the grandeur of whose scenery attracted people from distant parts of the world. We were now facing lofty snowy mountains. But these, though grand and sublime sights, were but outlying elevations that closed the view of remoter, vaster and grander mountains.

Had we now been commanded to go ahead on an exploring march to train and harden the troops, and had we kept to a bearing north by east, ten days of trudging, climbing and camping would bring us into the midst of that mountain tract that is bounded on the west and north by the Indus. There we should see peaks that range in height from twelve to seventeen thousand feet, or to an altitude above Europe's highest summit; and if, having seen these peaks, we still persevered in toilsome exploration, and pressed further north in that same region, we should at length come within view of the seventh highest mountain on the earth. We should behold the colossal white form of Nanga Parbat, whose culminant peak towers to a height of 26,620 feet above sea level.

The summit of this giant of the westernmost Himalayas no man has yet attained. The climate has beaten off the assault of those who sought the conquest of this mighty white mountain upon which fierce snowstorms and blizzards may rage in a midsummer's day. But, nevertheless, that uppermost domed snow peak still tempts adventure. From Europe and America there have come in recent years resolute parties

equipped to perfection for the great attempt. All have tried and all have failed. The summit of Nanga Parbat is still as far from man's ascent as Everest's peak, and two thousand feet below it lie the bones of perished climbers.

Having emerged from that hillside forest through which we had been marching since morning, we were now on an open area, and between us and the nearest high mountains was a tract of ridges, glens, precipices, woodland, and patches of tillage on fertile slopes. And now our destination was visible in the distance. Our march had all but ended, and we could descry in the little cantonment screened by trees, the roofs of those barracks that had been vacant for several months, and that had been under deep snow for many days during the winter.

When at last we arrived at the point where companies left the main road and ascended paths to their allotted quarters, we saw that the barrack buildings stood here and there along a ridge, where the builder had built wherever he could, and on some sites near a steep fall of ground. The area was well wooded. Round about the barracks grew pine trees, and their cones now and again dropped on roofs of corrugated iron. In one part where the grounds sloped to eastward, the outlook was on Kashmir, and the clearer the air, the better the view of the mountains and snows in that direction. And between the cantonment and Kashmir territory, which the river bounded, the swift Jhelum, transporter of forest logs, pursued its way along a deep gorge to the Punjab plain.

Winter had lingered in these hills, and on the evening after our arrival, hailstones beat upon bungalow roofs. But by and by the chilly tang left the air, the days became sunnier, and the distant mountains and the snows became still more beautiful to view. April passed, and the weather warmed, and May brought the cuckoo, whose glad notes echoed down among the wooded slopes and glens. In many places the wild rose bloomed in profusion, and the flowers and the bright sunshine brought forth butterflies.

In this tract of hill and forest, where lungs breathed Himalayan air, the regiment, adapting itself to the situation, trained, exercised and sported as it might; and in due time it became manifest that all had benefited from the climate. Complexions showed the change. Sick reports diminished, and those debilitated companies gained in health.

Months passed. The cuckoo was heard no more, and the wild flowers and the butterflies had vanished. Forest trees were tinged with brown and yellow. Breezes from the snowy Himalayas rustled the pines. The breath of winter had again come over those hills. There was a snap in the

air. The cry of the jackal sounded nearer at night, and sparrows sought peckings inside barrack thresholds. Mornings became darker and chillier, and everywhere now talk was in anticipation of the return to 'Pindi, of "going down," and of transport for one thing or another.

From the beginning of November preparations for the move went on from day to day, till at length, on a wintry morning, companies moved out of the lines, vacated the barracks, left not a man behind, and paraded on the road below the cantonment. There what little remained to be done was a matter of course. Transport was in order. Escorts had been told off. The band and drums, full of cheer and briskness, were at the head of the column. Everything was as it should be and all were present. Then, command given, the regiment, to spirited music, started on the march down the long winding road ; departed from the hills, not for good, but to winter on the plains of Rawalpindi.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### AFIELD IN THE PLAINS

OUR regiment, and all the other British units that had spent the hot weather in the hills, having returned to the plains in the latter part of November, once again Rawalpindi, the headquarters of the Northern Command, and the main military base for the North West Frontier, had its full garrison. But as it was now the season for divisional training, this garrison had soon to move afield.

In due course the programme for the manoeuvres was planned. The appointed day for the move came. A wintry dawn saw divers units of the British and Indian services astir, and by the time the mists had cleared, and the sun was shining, cavalry, artillery, infantry, pioneers and sappers and miners, with mules for pack and draught transport, and strings of trailing camels, were moving off for the manoeuvring country.

By the afternoon of the third day, a march in three easy stages had brought the British battalions to a place about forty-five miles from cantonments. And there day by day training schemes were put into execution. There with copious discharge of blank, imaginary battles were fought over a plain of brown Punjab soil, across areas fissured by deep water-courses, over arid and stony ridges covered with scrub, and over areas in which there were cultivated patches where the troops were told to keep off the crops, and have a care for tender shoots. And at the end of each day's operations, the troops would return to camp with dusty equipment, fouled rifle barrels, and scratched knees.

The weather was crisp and clear. The nights were chilly, and the days were bright and sunny, with never a speck of cloud to obscure those northern skies. From retreat till first post there was for us only the open air canteen, the coffee shop, and the camp fire; but little more was wanted. At 10-15 a drum tap commanded "lights out," and then we were lying in our tents where slumber soon came.

It was a cheerful camp. Everybody was in the best of humour. The troops were in fine fettle, and were showing by their looks the benefits of the military regimen fixed hours, simple food, ample sleep, and activity in the open air. And so all went merry till the day came when tents were struck, and the troops marched away and headed for another part of the country where further schemes in the manoeuvring programme were to be carried out.

Now the day on which this move took place was not like the preceding day. The morning was not at all bright. By midday the sun was not to be seen, and in the afternoon when the troops were on the way, the sky had darkened. A wind gradually arose. Roadside trees rustled and swayed in the breeze, and birds uttered notes of complaint. A squadron of cavalry cantering across the open country was screened by a cloud of whirling dust, and the wind played with like effect on the dust kicked up by a field battery that trotted past the infantry on the highway. Rain threatened, but only a few drops fell, though the skies were still louring when late in the afternoon our regiment arrived at the appointed camping ground.

That ground was near a straggling watercourse which was boldly marked on the map. The watercourse was then dry. It was but a mere sandy channel bed, strewn here and there with shingle and boulders. The direction of the water flow was marked by tufts of wild sedge-like grass that had been left bent by current pressure in the last season's flood. And in the natural course it seemed most probable that these grass tufts would again strain to the water drift—but not for some time to come, not until next year's monsoon would come with torrents and overflowings. And the fact that mattered now was that the bed of this watercourse was as moistureless as a patch of Arab desert under the sun. So companies dumped their baggage upon it, and on the ground alongside the regiment bivouacked for the night.

On the following morning the sun did not shine. There was a little brightening in the east at one time, but no sunburst followed, and skies were gloomy at the hour when the regiment moved off to play the part which had been assigned to it in the day's manoeuvre scheme.

Operations were assumed to extend over a wide area, but opposing forces never came into sham conflict that day. There was no blank firing, and consequently no fouling of rifle barrels. Having taken up a position at one point, the companies of our regiment dug shallow trenches. Then ensued a long pause, during which, we supposed, the command was awaiting the outcome of dispositions elsewhere. But no action seemed to follow, and at length

entrenching tools were packed, the mules were reloaded, and our own regiment moved away into another part of the country to counter some imaginary menace.

By this time that sky which had been louring since morning, became darker, and gusts of wind raised clouds of dust in the trail of cavalry movements. Rain again threatened, but again only a little fell, and it was not enough to lay the dust. But there were signs of more rain, when, towards four in the afternoon, operations ended, units closed, and returned to camp.

Now I believe that from the day the regiment marched out of barracks till this time, nobody in the ranks had caught a glimpse of the author of the manoeuvre scheme, the officer commanding the division. But now we saw him for the first time. As the battalion was approaching camp, the general with his staff rode up, and having exchanged a few words with our commanding officer, intimated that he wished to address the battalion. Accordingly, on arrival in camp, the eight companies were formed up, and the general on horseback proceeded to deliver his views to the attentive ears of a thousand still heads.

But it happened that shortly after the general had begun to speak, a faint drizzle set in, and that drizzle having gradually increased to a shower, brought the address to an end. So the G.O.C. departed, and the troops were dismissed. And the rain did not cease. A drizzle continued. At dusk rain was still falling, and it rained throughout the night.

With his two blankets, and the means wherewith to give them a tent-like rig, each man had made for himself a bivouac according to army camp craft, and for weather at certain states this would serve very well. A blanket bivouac would shelter from dews by night, from a hot sun by day, and from a light shower, but it was not proof now against this continuous rain. Blankets and kits were wetted through during the night, and it was wakeful camp.

However we had been hoping that maybe the morning would bring a change, that we might see clear patches of sky, and that we might have an interval of sunshine to dry our kits and clothing. But the rain did not end with the night. Daybreak brought no relief. The morning showed us only the sodden bivouacs in rain, cold and gloom. And we now saw that the bed of that watercourse alongside which we had camped was no longer dry. It was not in running flood, but it held pools of water, and the blankets and tents that had been dumped there were as wet as wet could be. And as many know very well, sodden and muddied rolls of blankets, and tents with the bamboo poles sticking out at the



ends, are awkward things to load upon the backs of mules and camels.

And this was the fatigue that had to be undertaken now, for orders had come to pack and decamp. The weather, it appeared, had brought the manoeuvres to an end. No more big schemes, no more sham battles for the present. We guessed now that we were bound for Rawalpindi. But for infantry 'Pindi was still a good way off. 'Pindi was three stages away.

The cold, dismal morning had far advanced, and it was still raining, when the regiment moved off. The distance to the camp for which it was bound was not great, but circumstances made the miles long, and no merry march was this. Wet to the skin as they trudged along that muddy road in rain and gloom, men could show no bright faces. Those by nature gay in spirit did not look cheerful now. Cheerfulness had vanished for the same reason that butterflies vanish, and songbirds become silent.

And for the animals that accompanied the regiment and bore its baggage, this weather had brought hardship. Pack mules, loaded with blankets that for hours had been absorbing the rain, were now bearing an extra burthen. They were carrying more than the fair weight, and it was little wonder that under the strain some of the animals collapsed on the way. And the camel, the so-called "ship of the desert," so sure-footed when traversing a sandy plain, had enough to do to keep on its four legs on a road surface that since the previous day had changed from dust to mud. Indeed the baggage escorts who kept an eye on the progress of these ungainly beasts of burthen, had reason to fear that they might come to grief, as they sometimes do on slippery roads. And when a poor camel sprawls and breaks a leg, and is pistolled—ah, well, then you have a carcass for disposal.

Late in the afternoon the regiment reached its destination, the place to which other units of the division had also moved. The camping ground was a level park-like space, bordered by trees. It was alongside the main road. Flowing water was within reach, and a railway station was near at hand. Being on the trunk road from Kabul to Delhi, it must have been used as a camping stage for centuries. Many and many a body of troops tramping along that dusty road, had rested there for the night, struck camp long before dawn, and moved off to complete another march before the sun gained power. It was a stage on the route followed by conquering Alexander's forces. The army of John Company in its latter days had known it. The victorious Afghans that vanquished

the Mahrattas at Panipat knew it, and so too did that other Afghan host that came to the slack and slaughter of Delhi.

When we arrived at this camping ground, we saw at once that we would not, or could not, be better off here than we had been in the place from which we had come. And now we might reflect how our condition had changed within the past few days. Three nights before we were snug in bone-dry tents. The night before last we had blanket bivouacs which served very well for the weather that then prevailed. Last night we had the same shelter, but the weather broke and the blankets could not keep out the rain. And tonight?—Tonight we would be exposed.

As the dismal afternoon wore on, and it became darker, sheets of drizzle swept across the camping area where there now lay a brigade of British troops. Here it was plain to us that the weather than had changed us in feeling, thought, and looks, had somewhat deranged our regimental system. We could not now pretend that this system was functioning in the manner in which it used to function in the days before Jupiter frowned, in the days when all went well with the manœuvres, and the sun shone from clear skies.

The regimental guard existed, no doubt. But it was a miserable guard to look at—a sergeant and a few men all drenched and chilled, standing at a wet, muddy spot near a little stack of ammunition boxes. The quartermaster was about somewhere. At one time he could be heard shouting at the top of his voice for orderly corporals. He wanted these orderlies to come and draw, and take clean out of his possession, a little pile of canned rations that lay exposed on the sodden ground. And the orderlies came and took delivery of those canned rations. But nobody then wanted such victuals. The troops thought not of preserves, but of beer, and coffee or tea. But these things could not be obtained, for the regiment had now no canteen or coffee shop. The weather had put these institutes out of business. But what of rum? Yes, rum there was, and well it was needed now for issue to the troops.

Nobody had thought that the quartermaster had a keg of this stimulant in reserve till the night was drearily closing in. Then came another shout for orderly corporals, and the word "Rum!" was repeated aloud and with cheer throughout the camp. And not once but twice was the rum issued. There was a plentiful supply of the spirit, and it was double-rationed. But not all drank of the rum that night, for there were in the regiment some A.T.A. men, and some men who, though not teetotallers, had no relish for the stuff. So in the end there was much spare or unwanted rum, and one con-

sequence of this surplus I shall have to mention before I have done with this narrative.

Some time after the second tot of rum had been served, there came an order to procure wood and light fires. This seemed to be the most beneficial thing in the world the troops could now do for themselves. And fortunately the wood was near at hand. The contractor had a store of it—whole stacks of dry seasoned timber of a species that was useless for the carpenter, but was excellent for fuel. And what a harvest of an indent that contractor executed that night! The wind that was chilling our wetted skies had blown him again.

The wood did not take long to kindle, and soon the camp in parts was illumined by great flaming bonfires, around which gathered bodies of shivering troops, the moisture of whose soaked clothing was soon converted into steam by the intense heat. But as a man could expose only one part of the body at a time to the blaze, the drying of the clothing must take a long time. But the process went on, and from the circles round the bonfires, the vapour continued to rise as from so many immense cauldrons.

After I had been standing for about half an hour among one of the crowds that surrounded the bonfires in steaming rings, I became a little wearied, or a little impatient, and instinct urged me to seek change or comfort elsewhere. So, having watched for a favourable moment, I quietly slipped out of the circle, and headed into the background.

Wandering about for some time in the darkness, I came upon what seemed to be the only place of cheer in the whole camp. This was the canteen of a field battery. The gunners too had their blazing camp fire, and this appeared to have been lighted long before our bonfires. But the gunners had what the British infantry battalions had not. They had beer. There was the tapped barrel, and there was the potman and cashier. But there were no circles standing around the fire, and it appeared that few, if any there had the power of standing.

Not a sober man was to be seen in the vicinity of that camp fire and beer barrel. With their drenched clothing plastered with mud, gunners lay about on the ground like the forms of slain Dervishes on a battlefield. Some lay on the open, while others could be seen huddled beneath ammunition wagons. The ground near the camp fire had been beaten into slippery mud, and there lay two or three men in a profound drunken sleep. These gunners, it appeared, had been lying there a long time, and the skirts of their great coats had been repeatedly trodden upon and beaten into the mud. Other drunken men, blindly tottering about, tripped and sprawled

over them, but those forms on the ground remained still as corpses.

After I had been standing for some time in the background close enough to observe the scene around the camp fire, but too far away to obtain any warmth from that fire, I happened to attract the attention of one of the gunners. This man too had his fill, but his speech was coherent, and he hailed me in a friendly spirit. He was a Devonshire man, and at the moment when he noticed me he had been uttering words in praise of his native county. I admitted that I had never been in Devonshire, but from all that I had heard and read, I was sure that it was a very fine county. I mentioned some places in its picturesque sea-coast, I mentioned Dartmoor and some of the scenes and characters in Blackmore's novel, "Lorna Doone." Our talk became freer and friendlier, and then this man of Oevon asked me why I was having no beer.

The reason should have been known to the gunner. I was having no beer here, because, according to this battery's own *hukm*, beer could not be sold in this camp to men of other corps. And for this rule the reason was plain. If the battery during these manoeuvres sold beer to men of other units, it might not have enough for its own men. But at this hour, and the battery in this state, no one was there to trouble about this rule. And when this friendly gunner threw down a rupee on the board, little was it suspected by the server that this coin was not his own, and that the jug of liquor which took away was not for himself, nor for another gunner, but for an infantryman standing in the background.

No sweeter beer have I ever tasted than the beer I drank from that jug. And deep was the gratitude I felt to that gunner, though somebody might say that he had but treated me at my own expense. But away with that unkind reasoning! Let it rather be said that what that battery chap did for me that night was the good turn of a friendly and hospitable man.

A little while later, having parted with the gunner, I returned to the battalion's lines. There the gatherings round the fires seemed to have increased, and owing to the greater heat from the flames, the diameters of the circles had become much greater. Gazing into one of these fires now was like gazing into the mouth of a furnace—the piles of seasoned logs having by this time been converted into a glowing masses of fierce intensity. And meanwhile from all those bonfires there continued to rise volumes of steam from the troops' clothing.

Unnoticed, I edged myself into a circle of men that surrounded one of the bonfires. Those men did not stand facing the flames. Their attitude in relation to the fire was as if they were filing round it in close single rank, body almost touching body. And after having exposed one flank to the fire for some time, the men reversed the position by turning about together. Then the other side of the body got its turn.

Pleasant and comforting was the warmth diffused by that big bonfire, and that fierce glowing core gradually consuming log after log of jungle wood was something to gaze at and to muse upon. But as my British warmer began to steam, I again became impatient with this unsatisfactory method of warming the body and drying the clothing; and thing of the long dreary night that lay ahead, I did now as I had done when I became tired of that other bonfire. I quietly dropped out of that circular file of men and sought the dark background.

As a light drizzle had just then set in, I approached a tree and stood beneath it. But that tree afforded but poor shelter. It was dripping, and whenever it was shaken by a blast, a shower fell from its branches. So I moved away towards another tree. But that other tree too was a dripping tree, and I had been standing beneath it only a moment when a startled bird flew out of its branches with a great commotion and clatter. And the thought that occurred to me then was that this kind of tree was not a habitual roost for that bird.

Leaving those bleak and dripping trees, I turned in another direction, and sought what chance might bring me in the area outside the limits of the camping ground. I even resolved to venture far into unknown ground. But I did not go as far as I had intended. After I had made some headway. I was checked by darkness and misty gusts. Yet I did not turn back. I continued to grope and explore, for now I was under the urge of a prime motive, and that was the hope or chance of discovering some little place where under cover I might rest for one hour, or two hours, if not for all the hours that yet remained till dawn. Much indeed I needed rest, for I had come off guard that evening, and was one of the little party that had been exposed to the rain all night and had had no sleep.

This simple need, then, it was that led my further steps in to an area of greater obscurity where there was scrub, and where there were thorny fences. Here I could not discern things clearly, for at night my eyes cannot see as well as the eyes of other men. Ever since boyhood had that defect in vision been causing me mishaps in dark places, and here it caused me mishap. My sight failed to distinguish a sudden change in slope. At one spot I thought that the ground was

level, but it was not so. It declined steeply, and the consequence for me was a false step. I blundered, stumbled, and fell forward on my hands. And this, though not the most hurtful, was I believe, the heaviest fall I have had in my life, so heavy were my limbs with fatigue, and so great was the weight of rain-water that had been soaked by my clothing, and above all by that great soaking garment, the British warmer.

And now so strongly did the desire to ease the fatigue of my limbs come upon me, that wet and rugged though the ground was, I even thought of resting for a little while where I had fallen. But will prevailed. I got on my feet again, and searched about and found my helmet which had rolled away into the darkness. The *pugri* which, I feared, might have become undone, had fortunately held.

Still wandering in the darkness, after the shock from the fall had made the pulse beat faster and cleared my thoughts, I heard the murmur of running water, and presently I came to the brink of a full-flowing brook. Where was the source of this stream? Which of the Five Rivers would receive its waters?—or was it some little lone tributary of the great Indus? Such were the questions in geography that occurred to me as I listened for a moment to the flowing of the stream, to a purl that would sound pleasant to the ears of tired marchers in days of scorching sun and drought, but that now brought to mind only the thought of wintry rain and flood.

Turning away from the stream, I approached some habitations, but was deterred from further advance by the hostile bark of a dog. Again I turned, and having gone some distance, I caught a faint glimpse of some animal that slunk away in the darkness. Was this a hyena, or a jackal? I wondered. It was probably a jackal, that animal that is ever keen on a military trail. Wherever in India armed forces are encamped, wherever bodies of troops are afield, wherever an army is on the move, you may be sure the jackal is not far off.

After a little further wandering about, I caught sight of an object that gave me a thrill of hope. On a rise of ground I came across a small hooded vehicle with its shafts supported at the draft level. This was one of those *ekkas* that are so common on the roads of Northern India. Here, I thought, is the very thing for me. On this little *ekka* I shall obtain rest, shelter from the rain, and maybe some sleep. But in a moment that sweet hope was shattered, for as I drew near I perceived that the *gari* was occupied by a man who was a military contractor for some commodity or other. He had snuggled into a reclining position and was securely wrapped up against cold and rain. He was in complete possession of

the vehicle, and he occupied it in such a manner as if he were demonstrating that it had been built for only one passenger.

This little experience was discouraging. It put the thought into my mind that every possible place of rest or shelter in these surroundings had already been discovered and occupied by somebody, and I became convinced that which I had been seeking could not be obtained for love or money.

But though baffled at every turn so far, I still had a little hope left. The need still urged me to continue the quest. So I went ahead, and I had not gone very far when my perseverance won reward. I found what I wanted, and it was a most fortunate discovery. Had I gone but a few yards to the left or to the right I should have missed the path of luck that led to the entrance to a cave at the foot of a low hill.

The purpose for which that cave had been made was a question that did not enter my mind at the moment of my discovery. All my attention at that instant was held by the idea that this was the very place that would serve my need. Here, if the ground is not wet, I shall lie alone and sleep till daylight, I thought. But no sooner had I appeared at the opening and stooped to enter, than I was startled to find that the place was occupied, and that I was instantly recognised by somebody who greeted me by name in a friendly London voice.

There were in the cave a number of men, but in the pitch darkness I could not make out who they were. Instinct however told me that all of them were unacquainted with me except this fellow who had greeted me. He, I was sure, knew me very well. There was familiarity and friendship in his voice. But though it was an easy matter to ask him who he was in a polite and kindly way, yet, curiously, I refrained from asking the simple question. Indeed to this time the identity of that man remains a query to my mind. But it is a guess, or a belief of mine, that this was the same fellow who once upon a hot day, and in the course of an arduous march in the North West Frontier, slaked his thirst with me at the waters of the Kabul river.

Well, this cave was pitch dark, the ground was damp, our clothing was sodden and our equipment was irksome. But we thought little now of these discomforts. Our minds were in a glow of gratefulness for the happy chance that had brought us to this place of shelter. True, we had found but a dark cavern, but we felt as gratified as if we had found a snug domestic billet. And wondering how the less fortunate

out in the open would fare, wondering how the brigade would pass the night away, we lay down, and though our heads had but topees as pillows, we were soon all asleep.

Now as we were in a part of the country where arms had to be watched, it might be wondered where our rifles were at this time. Well, it is a fact that the rifles lay in the place where they were grounded when we arrived in camp, and there in the waterlogged ground they still lay unguarded. No flying sentries were anywhere to be seen in our lines, nor indeed in the lines of any other unit of our brigade. Tonight the safety of arms was not a regiment's first thought. Tonight a regiment might be thinking of anything but its arms. A prime lesson of Frontier camps was forgotten for the moment. For more than three years our men had been minding their rifles with the vigilance of a serpent for its offspring, but tonight all were off their guard.

Here then was the door of opportunity open for the Pathan rifle thief who was ever watchful for such occasions. True, we were many miles from the river that bounds Frontier territory, but the Indus was not the limit of the gun-seeker's quest. He ventured farther eastward. He, on sly pretext, and with keen reconnoissant eye for camps and barracks, worked his way down-country. But if a sleeping fox catches no poultry, a sleeping brigand misses chances. It was supposed that hawk-eyed Jan of the soft sandals, stayed at home and slept that wild night and never dreamt that there in that brigade camp by the high road lay unwatched rifles by the score and by the hundred—loot that a Frontiersman would value at a thousand rupees a *topak*.

When I awoke after a sleep of some hours, the cave was still in darkness, but I could now make out the position of the entrance by a faint light. I assumed that this light was a sign of approaching dawn, and I became convinced that it was so, when after a little while I heard a cock crow in a neighbouring village. But as it still seemed far from day-break, I turned over and sought further sleep. And I slept on till I was awakened by the talk of two of the other men, who arose and left the cave. It was still dark, and my eyes were still closed, but I knew from his voice that one of these men was that unrecognised friend of whom I have spoken. And he had not lost his cheerfulness, nor his whimsical humour, for as he went forth into the open I heard him speak of this burrowed shelter he was leaving as "the cave of Adullam."

By and by other men arose, and in pairs or singly, drowsily shuffled away, till at last I found myself alone. But solitude did not weigh upon my spirit. Indeed I even regretted now



in vanity that I had not found this shelter unoccupied, and that I had not spent the night here alone. Had this been so, I fancied how I could some fine day in a barrack-room, brag that I was the only man in the brigade who had slept that night under a roof. True, this was not a house roof, but the earthen roof of a cave. But sound and secure was that cover against all weathers, and well might the place serve a picket in a campaign. It might even be fancied by a command for a higher purpose, and I conceived that had the staff that foraged ahead of the Grand Army espied a similar underground retreat, they would certainly not pass it by. Why, they might flag it, and maybe suggest it to the emperor and generalissimo as a snug place to lie in during a night of Russian winter.

I did not, however, remain long in the cave after the other men had left. From the increased light I guessed that it was long past the hour when reveille is sounded at this season, and something having hinted to me that it was time to be stirring, I arose and made my way back to the place from which I had wandered the night before. I returned to the area where the brigade had passed the night as best it could.

The camp looked dreary in the morning light. The rain had ceased, but the cold was now keen. The break in the weather, it appeared, had brought in the severe winter of Northern India. That day when we marched out of barracks at the beginning of the manoeuvres, we believed it was winter, because it was December. But we were mistaken. Now only was it real winter. And if you stood upon an eminence and looked away towards the bleak north, you could see that an enormous snowfall had made the mighty Himalayas look nearer, and that the lower hills were specked with white. We were now experiencing one of those rigorous changes that at this season make life harder in the Punjab. We now had the weather that brings the pneumonia and the fevers that sweep away so many of the inhabitants, young and old, to the cremation ghat and to the cemetery.

The great bonfires had long since died out, and had left unsightly heaps of ashes. The troops, unwashed and unshaven, were looking pale and haggard, as they stood about in their muddled and bedraggled clothing. Now indeed the regiment was in a state in which it would not like to be seen by eyes outside the service. Cheer had left all faces. No sally of wit or humour would now raise a smile, and the tongues of the few who were growlers, rain or shine, were not all still.

But for grumbling there was no reason. Nobody could be blamed. Circumstances had ruled things. The general may

have proposed, but the weather had disposed—the weather, or the climate, that dominant element that in Russia destroyed the Grand Army, and that through history had upset the plans of many another campaign.

But, whatever had happened, there was no doubt now that the troops were eager to quit this camp. They wanted to march, and forthwith if possible. "Why not," they said in effect, "start for 'Pindi right away, slog it day and night, and cover those two stages in one march? Once on the road and we'll march and march, and the heated blood will keep bodies warm, and we'll struggle on and get to the end somehow."

This spoke good spirit. But to a forced march, as suggested, the command had given no thought. It had adopted a better plan, and that plan was to transport the British battalions by rail to their stations—one of these stations being a hundred and fifty miles down-country. But the railway was not prepared for this call on its services. It was a big indent for transport to receive at the spur of the moment, and though the traffic department may have taken prompt steps to meet the military demand, things could not be done at once. There were delays before the stock could be assembled and despatched up-country to that little station hard-by our camp.

Slow indeed was the execution of that order. Several hours passed before a troop train was sighted, and tedious were those hours of waiting in that waterlogged, muddy camp amid rain, cold and gloom. However, when the first train arrived to carry away a regiment whose destination was a remote cantonment, we were cheered. The news gave us hope that other trains would soon follow, and that we would be fetched back to our cantonment in good time.

But we were deceived by those hopes. Prolonged were the intervals between one arrival and another, and as the dreary wintry afternoon dragged on, we foresaw that daylight would not see us out of the camp. Indeed darkness had already begun to gather when at length word reached us that our transport had arrived. Our turn had come at length, and ours was the last of the British battalions to leave that desolate weather-beaten spot, and when we reached the siding we saw that no passenger coaches there awaited us. Passenger coaches were not to be had. The transport of other regiments had exhausted carriage stock, and so only freight wagons could be provided for us. But freight wagons were very good things now. Sound and sure carriers they were, and glad were we when into them we had clambered, and in the deepening darkness were borne away to Rawalpindi.

Reveille was sounded in barracks at the usual hour next morning. But the regiment was not roused by the call. The regiment lay still. Deep was its repose. It had indeed a great long sleep that morning, and when at length it awoke, the question that probably occurred to every man was: how is the regiment this morning? For a belief had prevailed that the experiences of the last two or three days would put many men in "dock." There had been talk of pneumonia, bronchitis, rheumatics, and what not. Some imagined that a large part of the regiment would have its teeth chattering this morning. Some foresaw bundles of familiar army forms being filled in, an overflowing sick parade, and the station hospital crowded out.

But nothing like this came to pass. The morrow belied the prophets of illness. The morning's sick parade was not abnormal. In fact it was but a small party, and those who attended were not men who had been on manoeuvres, but men who had been left in barracks.

A few days later, however, news came that a lance corporal had died in hospital, that the cause of his death was "double pneumonia," and that this was due to exposure on manoeuvres. But what of all the other men? What of the rest of the regiment who had also been exposed on these manoeuvres, and now seemed none the worse for the experience? If these questions were not uttered, they occurred to the mind of everyone who heard the report of that one and only casualty.

But an explanation was soon current. Without judgment or comment, it passed from mouth to mouth in a version of fact that was as brief as a docket. The deceased lance corporal had consumed more than his two tots on the night when the rum was distributed to the troops. That rationed allowance did not satisfy him. It only created a desire for more of the spirit. And more he sought, and more he obtained. In his company were several men to whom this rum was caviare, and those fellows tipped their portions into the drinker's mug. Thus, the corporal, who came of a canny race, contrived to have his fill. But though a cunning man he was reckless in liquor. He drank this rum without moderation or measure and within a short space of time. He was soon drunk, and after staggering about on the wet dark ground, he at length collapsed in a puddle where he lay throughout the night in a sleep that was a sleep of doom.

As experience of that wintry spell in open bivouacs had brought about no other case of serious illness, the regiment had reason to be gratified. And the fact was a matter of note for the P.M.O., for was not Ours the regiment that only ten months before had to be transferred from the Frontier

because of recurring fever among the men of four companies? The regiment evidently was now fit again. The Gosling Greens that had recently carried the repute of a "sick regiment," was sick no more. It had been weak, but it was now strong. Those manoeuvres had shown that it had regained its hardihood. Two years had passed since it left the banks of the Hooghly and came to the North West. A Peshawar summer had broken the health of half the regiment. But a summer on the hills of Murree had repaired that health, and now the restoration had been proved.

And when, four months later, the lingering winter of the north had passed away, and a stronger sun was heating the land, and faint breezes wafted vernal odours across the plain of Rawalpindi, and verdure and bloom announced the advance of the season, bright was the spirit of the regiment, for once again it was getting ready to move to those same Murree hills. Once again it was packing for the march that would bring it back to that cantonment among the pines on the heights above the Jhelum, and above the steep wooded glens where the cuckoo's notes cheer the ear of exiled Tommy in the joyous month of May.

## CHAPTER XXV

### LAST DAYS : FAREWELL TO THE THOUSAND

By the time we had returned from Rawalpindi to spend a third season on the hills of Murree, the regiment had greatly changed. Indeed to those who had known it for a long time it had become so changed by the incoming of new men, and the outgoing of seniors, that it appeared almost a new regiment.

Our colonel, having come to the end of his term of command, had retired on half pay, and we had now a new commanding officer, and also a new adjutant. Among other ranks familiar faces had become fewer and fewer. Discharge on pension, "completion of twelve," and transfer to the reserve, had taken away many old stagers.

Our company colour-sergeant, a trusted and competent "flag," and a man of admirable character, had gone on pension, and had been replaced by a young and little known man who had just been given the "crown." Our experienced section commander, the most accomplished of all the regiment's sergeants in camp craft, and in matters of Frontier service and campaigning—he too, having served the years that earn a pension, had left us for good.

Well do I remember the last occasion I witnessed the departure of such Home-going men. It was at Rawalpindi on a cold dark morning in January long before reveille had sounded. The regiment was still deep in the sleep of a winter's night when somebody shouted down the lines, "Fall in the time-expired!" And soon after a big party paraded with their kit bags, and amid handgrips, mellowed farewells and military promises, were marched away to the railway station. The party were bound for a troopship that lay moored in distant Karachi, the very same troopship that had just brought out drafts for this and that regiment, drafts of pink-faced young men that brought disturbing strangeness and freshness into many a barrack in India.

And now too the time had come when men had already begun to talk in anticipation of the return of the regiment to the United Kingdom. The battalion's period of foreign service was drawing to an end, and it would soon be moving to another station, from which, after a year or two, it would proceed to Bombay and embark for England.

But the regiment's next move did not now concern me. The period that I had engaged to serve with the colours was expiring, and I should soon be due for transfer to the reserve. But I would not be going to England. That depot at Gosport would never see me. The taking up of certain employment that I had in view would mean that I should receive my discharge in India.

This prospect gratified me, and in truth I may say that I looked forward with gladness to my release from the service, for, as I have mentioned, the regiment had greatly changed, and many men whom I had long known and liked, had gone. Besides, I was convinced that I was not well suited for military life, though I had adapted myself to its ways and performed duties with a will and to the best of my ability. Many of the experiences of the rough and tumble of regimental life I could recall with pleasure ; and sweet too in my memory were the friendships of the barrack, the tent, and the bivouac. But for all that it was a fact that I had often said to myself that the army was not for me. And so too was it a fact that for a long time I had been oftener thinking of things outside the army than of things within.

For " promotion " never had I any aspiration. Firstly, because I felt that I had not the fitness or aptitude ; and, secondly, because I had no intention of staying on in the army. The " stripe " that I wore while I held a little billet in the regimental school was good enough. And how ill-adapted my mind was for the mastery by rote of the hum-drum details of drill and training will be indicated if I state that for those little manuals that were to be seen on the shelf of a sergeant's bunk, I had a distate that nothing could overcome. Never could I apply myself for any length of time to the study of such books. I could study maps for hours, I could pore attentively over engineer's blueprints, I could read over a long judgment on a dry point of law, or search through masses of statistics for little grains of knowledge, but never could I concentrate for any length of time on those non-com's " guides to promotion."

As the time passed, the deeper grew my belief that the occupation to which I had at first turned my hand when a youth was the true one, or at least the one for which by nature I was best fitted, and to that occupation I had a hope

of returning some time or other when an opportunity might offer. In fact eventually that opportunity did offer, and so I went back to the practice of that which I was now certain was my true trade.

It might seem that the period I had spent in the services had been a waste of time in the most youthful part of my life. But I had no regret on that score. The time was not without gains. True, there was much monotony at times, but the life was active, and service with the regiment had enabled me to see regions and peoples which I should never have had an opportunity of seeing in another occupation.

Two months before the end of my engagement, I applied for a furlough to Calcutta, and this having been granted, I one fine day shook hands with friends, left a barrack that stood amid pines, and, with a coolie at my heels carrying my kit, passed down the path to the road that led to Murree, where I intended to catch the mail tonga for Rawalpindi.

I was in a cheery mood, and when I reached the end of the path and looked down the road, I smiled, and in a whimsical spirit, repeated half aloud the well known line from Shakespeare—"A horse! a horse!—" And I had no sooner uttered the words than the coolie, who, though he did not understand my expression, knew my want, exclaimed "*hai!*" as he pointed ahead towards the bend of the road where at that moment there appeared a saddled pony led by a syce.

On this hired pony, then, that had so luckily come round the corner at the instant of my need—a little circumstance that struck me as singularly auspicious—I rode onwards to Murree along a winding road amid pleasant scenery. It was early in the afternoon of a calm mild day in the bloom of the season. June had just gone by, and so the cuckoo's notes that evoked thoughts of the Homeland, were no longer heard; but the fragrance of tree and flower was in the air, and flitting butterflies were numerous. It was a very quiet hour for this pony ride of four miles, and the only member of the service I met on the way was a young officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

A little distance from the place where I passed this officer, the way rose steeply to a point where there was a sharp bend in the road, and where a wooded projection of the hillside, closed the view of a vast expanse of hill, glen and forest. At this spot, which was about seven thousand feet above sea-level, a person leaving the hills for good might look back at the country before it passed out of sight. So now, stirred by a sentiment of farewell, by the thought that I should never again behold this grand scenery, I paused, turned the pony round, and for a moment gazed wistfully at the region I was leaving behind.

In the remote distance could be seen the towering white peaks of some of the highest mountain ranges in the world. Within nearer view were hills with cultivated patches on their terraced slopes, deep defiles, and steep places concealed by copse and thicket, amid which the wild rose bloomed. Yonder among the trees lay that little cantonment that I knew so well. There the regiment's barracks, hardly visible among the pines, were now full of life, but a few months hence they would be empty and silent, and their roofs would be covered with winter's snow. A chill blast would be sighing among the pines, and those forested hills would hear not the bugle-call, but the howls of the famished jackal prowling amid the deserted lines.

I turned again and rode away, and when I had gone round the jutting precipice that closed the view to northward, I felt as if I had bidden farewell not only to this region I had just gazed upon for the last time, but also to the army and all its associations. And at the same moment the thought struck me that I had passed a turning point in my life.

When I arrived at the tonga depot, where I discharged the syce and coolie that had accompanied me, I was informed by the clerk that I and two other passengers who had been booked for the plains, would have a barouche for the journey. That, I fancied, was another little token of luck. A barouche, roomy, open and comfortable, instead of a common tonga! And further, the clerk told me that a European engineer of the Public Works Department, and a Hindu official of some other department, would be my fellow-travellers.

Fares paid and luggage secured, we three took our seats in the barouche, the engineer and I on one side, and the Hindu opposite, and in a moment were proceeding at a fairly brisk pace down the long, winding road that, with a precipice above, and a precipice below, curved round the brows of wooded heights, and passed through stretches of shady pine forest—as pleasant a journey on a barouche on a mellow sunny afternoon as a man could wish.

There was plenty of talk on the way, but it came mostly from one tongue. The engineer, who was of the Punjab Irrigation Department, was the talker. The Hindu and I for the greater part of the time were but mere listeners.

"What has become of the monsoon?" was the opening remark of the P.W.D. man.

The Hindu, to whom the question was addressed, had assumed an oblique position on the opposite seat. He wore a large white pugri, and his spectacles had shiny yellow rims. His forehead seemed prematurely furrowed, and this I conceived may have been caused by dint of application to recur-



ring mathematical problems, or to puzzling operations in accountancy.

Well, this seer-like man, so seemingly acute, was unable to account for the lateness of the monsoon in Northern India. But that did not matter. The question was enough for the questioner. It had introduced for him the subject of "irrigation." Mention of that word drew from him a flow of talk about canals, dams, cuts and catchments, of schemes that had turned barrenness into fruitfulness, of arid areas brought under rich crops, and of great tracts that might be fertilized by tapping some river or other at such a point.

Thus did our P.W.D. friend talk shop copiously. But I was sure that he talked from experience and from depth of knowledge. I had no doubt that he knew his business, and that his brain had an easy command of the science of practical irrigation. And to me the talk was fresh and enlightening, and for a change was indeed pleasant to hear after the chatter of the barracks.

The pines on the forest slope were casting shadows in the mellow afternoon sun when we arrived at the first stage. There, the ponies, having finished their trip, were released from the barouche. Their run had been on the down grade all the way, but they were now in a heavy sweat, and their slender flanks were heaving like the flanks of a hound after a hare chase. And as they were taken away to be unharnessed, rubbed down, and watered, the engineer and I repaired to the dak bungalow for refreshment.

There were no other visitors at that rest house. We had the place all to ourselves. We sat at the same table, and while the engineer's brandy and soda effervesced with amber sparkles, and my Guinness frothed to a brown top, our Hindu fellow-traveller outside had sought the water-tap, copiously rinsed his mouth, gargled repeatedly, drank from his silver lota, wiped his face and readjusted his pugri.

Meanwhile, a fresh pair of ponies had been put to the barouche, and after a little while we were off again. Having travelled a further eleven miles, we were clear of the foothills and the scrub. We had now reached the true Punjab plain, and thenceforward on the straight level run to Rawalpindi, no grass grew under the ponies' hoofs. The pace was as fast as we could have wished, and again and again the drive became a gallop.

During this part of the journey the P.W.D. man was not so talkative. He had lost his fluency and was silent for long intervals. It seemed as if the irrigated tract of his mind had become afflicted by a drought. The Hindu, on the other hand, had become more communicative, and I remember

that at one point on the journey, as the declining rays of the evening sun stretched across the plain, he drew our attention to a house that stood back some distance from the road. That bungalow, he said, had been the home of a retired Indian police officer who had become wealthy by taking bribes.

We arrived in Rawalpindi before dusk. There the P.W.D. engineer and the Hindu went their different ways, and I sought the dak bungalow where I put up for the night. At that rest-house my sleep was sound, but it lasted too long. The morning found me with little time to catch the Calcutta mail, and in the fear that I might miss that most important train, I quitted the dak bungalow in great haste, and reached the station almost on the stroke of the hour.

As I had not a second to spare, I could not obtain a ticket. "Don't mind," said the booking clerk, "you can get a ticket at the next stop." A blue-eyed locomotive driver, who was British, was leaning out of his cab, and as he gazed towards the end of the train for the signal, his eyes met mine. The guard was about to put his whistle to his lips, but seeing a white man in khaki pressed for time, he stayed the signal for as many seconds as enabled me to board that train that was to bear me away on a journey of fourteenhundred miles.

The compartment that I entered I had all to myself for a long time, and the first hour or two I spent in looking through the pages of an illustrated paper, and gazing now and again at the country on either side of the railway. As the morning advanced, and the train sped onwards to the south-west, the heat became intense. The sun beat down upon the Punjab plain with greater power. Its rays smote the cheek like heat from a fierce furnace, and from the soil that it scorched, the suction of the train's motion brought fine dust whirling into the carriages.

In the afternoon, tired of gazing at the landscape, at passing stations, and Indians of strange garb and looks, I dozed again and again, and when evening came the carriage seats were covered with dust, and the newspaper that I had been reading was shrivelled by the heat. Twilight was mellow and lingering, and two or three hours after darkness had set in, and after a light meal had been served to me by a waiter from a station refreshment room, I lay down, and rocked by the motion of the train, slept through the night.

In the morning when I awoke and looked through the carriage window, the air was fresh and cool, and I saw that the face of the country had changed. No longer was it the land of the Five Rivers, but the great plain of the Ganges,

Hindustan proper, the "Middle Land" of the ancients. The train, still going south-east, was now traversing a richer, greener, and better cultivated country, where the ryot afield with his rude wooden plough and oxen, was a common sight. And no mountain or hill was now discernible within the reach of vision. The entire territory within the horizon was flat, and over this vast alluvial plain that seemed boundless and infinite, prevailed the heat and glare of a powerful sun.

During the greater part of this long hot day, as the train went onwards through the United Provinces, and through the province of Bihar, I was still alone, and I was alone during the night which passed away in sound sleep. And next morning when I awoke, a glimpse of the country told me that I had reached Bengal. I had passed beyond the limits of the firm territory, and had entered the region of the Delta, prolific land of rivers and creeks and yielding slit bed, where flourished the rice, the plantain, the palm and the bamboo. So now I knew that the end of my journey was near. I was approaching the terminal, and gazing ahead, with the fresh morning air on my face, I at length espied in the distance the signals that told me my destination was in sight.

At Howrah I left the dusty train, and passing over the long bridge, beheld once more the broad sweep of the turbid Hooghly with the ships of the nations afloat upon it. And so here I was again then at that place where I first landed in the country—Calcutta, that city founded a hundred miles from the sea by that romantic merchant adventurer, Job Charnock.

In that city life for me changed from khaki to mufti. There I took off the uniform of the regiment never to wear it again. From military service I received a final discharge in due course. I left the army for good. I became once again a civilian.

Many years have passed since then. The world has sadly changed, and cares have multiplied and burthened my attention. But this narrative that closes here is a testimony that after all time has not effaced my memories of the days spent in fellowship with that Thousand that was Ours.





